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1981

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When the Ulsterman scored his greatest win

PORSCHE RETAINS ITS LE MANS KINGSHIP

Ickx and Bell reunited for 24-hour glory

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How F1 teams and rulemakers clashed

THE VOICE OF BRITISH MOTORSPORT
MOTORSPORT NEWS

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The British Grand Prix was a highlight of the season in front of a vast crowd

A year of change; a year of surprises: 1981

The 1981 season was one of surprises. In Formula 1, the Cosworth DFV-engined cars remained competitive to the last as the turbocharged opposition came on strong by adding reliability to horsepower; carbonfibre technology entered the category and the rulemakers fell out with the teams but a peace broke out that shaped the sport's future.

There was the FISA/FOCA war with the governing body and the teams' body fighting for control of the regulations and the commercial side of Formula 1, an argument that ultimately shaped the Concorde Agreement that has kept the teams in order ever since. In sportscar racing, an elderly Porsche dominated Le Mans but the future wasn't far away as Group C was just around the corner and a new era was about to dawn.

In rallying, plenty of experts were left looking undercooked when Audi's four-wheel-drive Quattro entered the sport and started winning, while in saloon car racing the staid-looking Rover started beating the cool Ford Capri. Regularly. Club racing was booming with more one-make classes breaking the mould and even in hot rod racing there was a surprise as Ormond Christie rocked the establishment with his indecently quick Toyota Starlet.

Once again, memories came flooding back as the hard-working Motorsport News team sat down at its computers. We have been fascinated reminiscing on an earlier time and comparing it to the present day, saddened by the number of teams, venues and drivers that are no more but excited by the amazing images of the time and the stories that went with a golden age.

We hope that you enjoy this look into how the sport was 40 years ago and will join us later in the year when we fast forward to another decade. Just like the sport itself, the Motorsport News team never stands still.

David Addison
Editor-in-chief
Motorsport Moments

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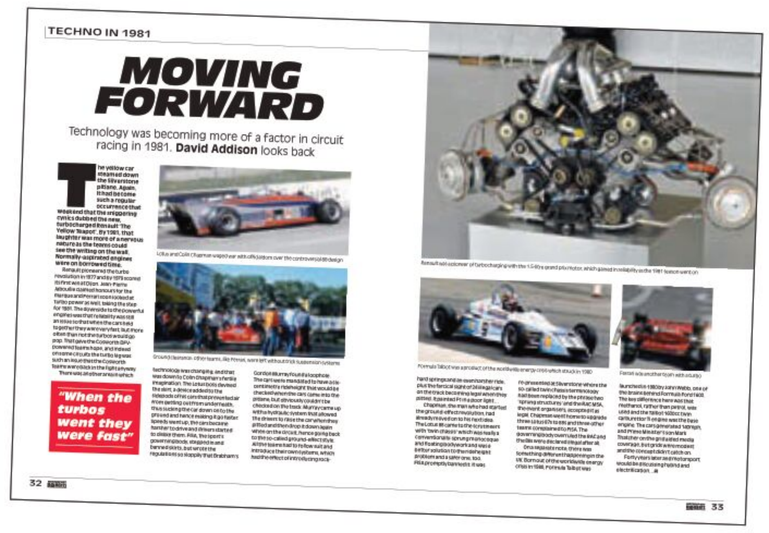
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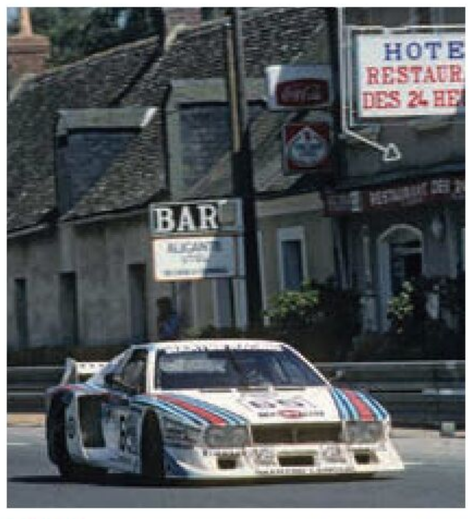

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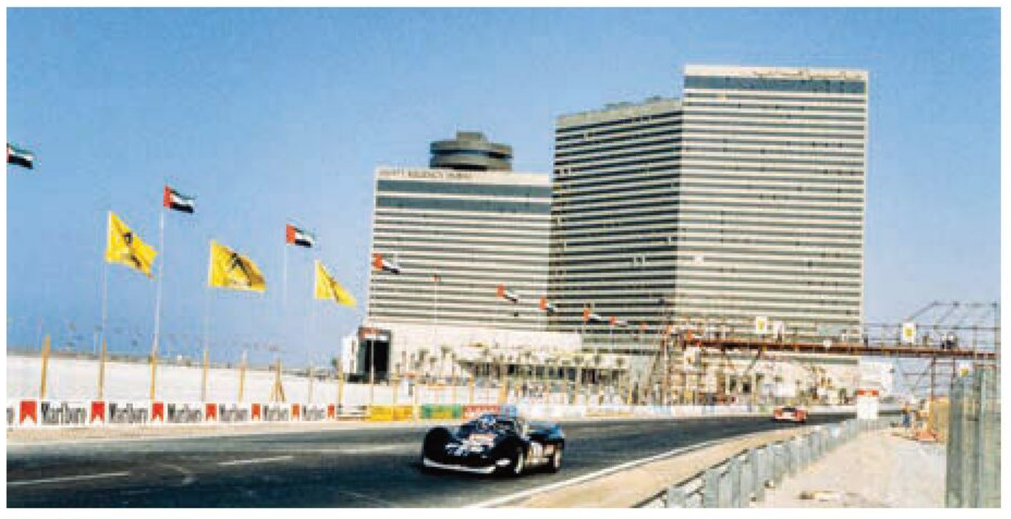

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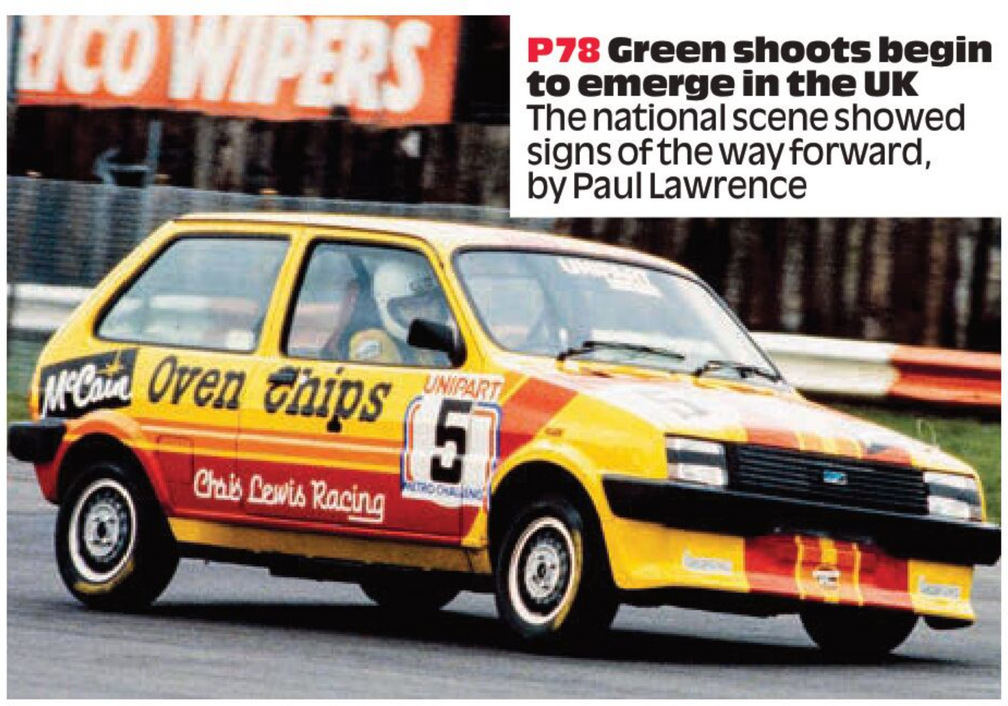

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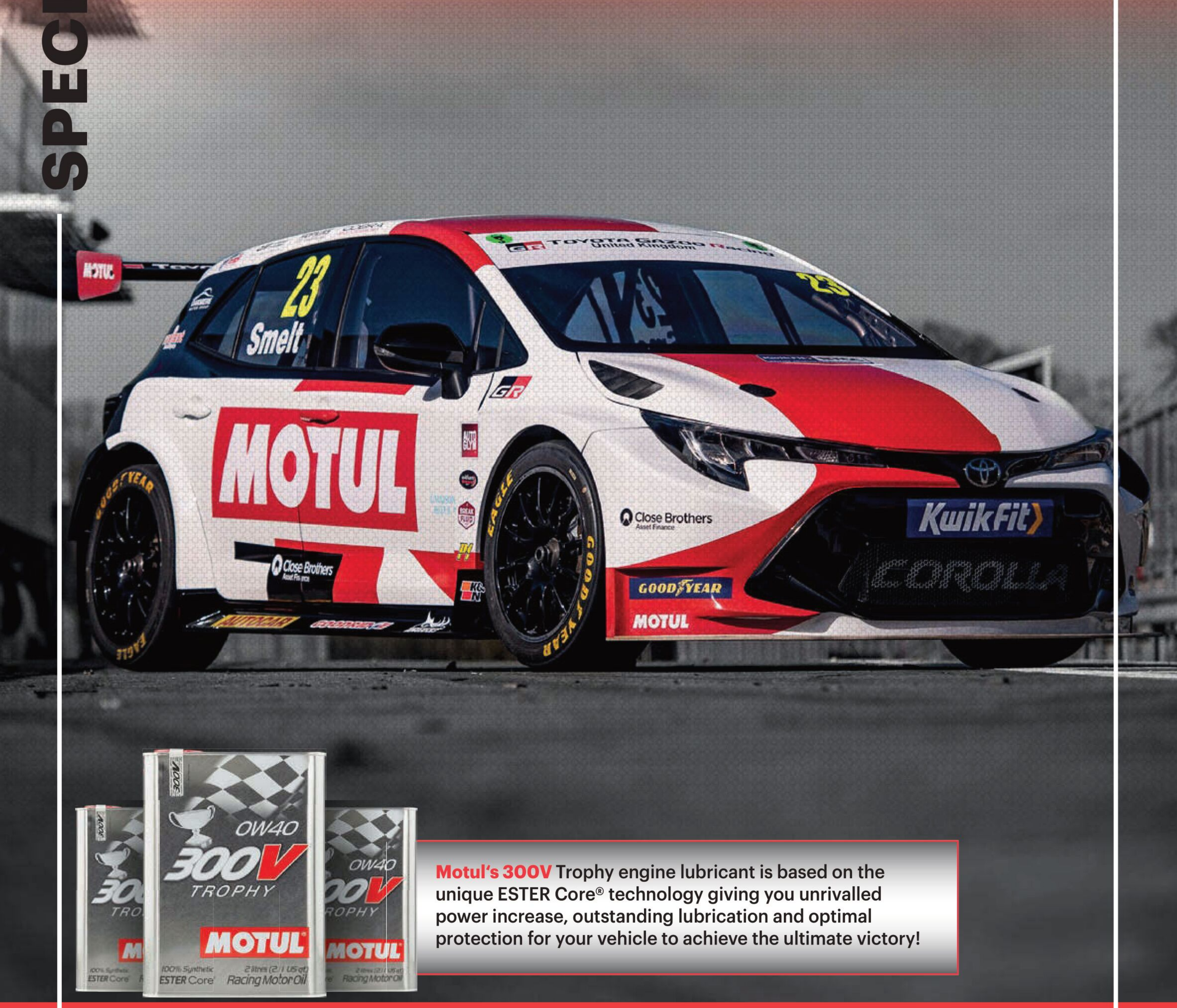

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Nelson Piquet fought off reigning World champion Alan Jones for the title

NELSON PIQUET SWINGS LOW FOR A MAIDEN GRAND PRIX TITLE

Matt James looks at a season where the rulebook was tested as much as the drivers

Gordon Murray's inventiveness as a designer knew no bounds. Take a look at the Brabham BT46B in 1978. Desperate to keep up with Lotus and its all-conquering, ground-effect Lotus 78, the South African guru came up with the idea for the infamous fan car.

The Italian car was powered by a flat-12 Alfa Romeo unit and the cumbersome and wide motor prevented Brabham and Murray exploiting the airflow under the car, as Lotus had done. Cue a rethink and the suction fan that took a new approach to creating low pressure under the chassis.

For 1981, a minimum rideheight was put in place in an effort to slow the frightening cornering speeds that grand prix cars were able to achieve. Machines had to have a six-centimetre ground clearance but this could, of course, only be checked when the cars were stationary in front of the scrutineers. Once the car had taken to the Tarmac, there was no way of assessing its height.

As MN put it at the time, Murray and Brabham came up with a solution that "exploded a bomb" within the ranks of governing bodies FISA and FOCA. The hydropneumatic suspension was devised by Murray. It used soft compressed air and enabled the drivers to (as MN put it "when working properly") release the air and sink the BT49C below the prescribed level when on track and then rise up to regulation height when it returned to the pits. As Alan Henry wrote in MN's season review: "It was a complicated system which depended for its effectiveness on the airflow over the top of the car gently compressing the suspension and unless all the valves and seals worked perfectly, it didn't always rise up again."

Other teams were immediately up in arms about this trick, particularly as Nelson Piquet walked the third race

of the season, the Argentine Grand Prix, and won by 26 seconds from Williams' Carlos Reutemann. Indeed, Williams had protested the system's legality but it was not upheld.

It wasn't necessarily Piquet's domination of the race that had raised the eyebrows highly, it was perhaps the performance of Brabham's journeyman second driver Hector Rebaque, who blissfully powered around the outside of Williams's title chaser Reutemann for second place before the Mexican's eventual retirement. The alarm bells were chiming very loudly indeed.

Williams was affronted, because it expected its trinity of powerhouses to continue where it had left off at the end of the previous season. There was something irresistible about the blend of ambitious team owner Frank Williams, engineering guru Patrick Head and the straight-talking, no-nonsense Australian Alan Jones.

Jones had been picked up by the British team after defying the odds in a Shadow and winning the Austrian Grand Prix in 1977. The driver had been through the teething troubles while Head and Williams got to grips with ground effect and clawed its way to Lotus levels of performance. Five wins out of six races towards the back end of 1979 showed that the penny had dropped, and the combination strode gloriously to a World championship in 1980. They'd put Brabham and Piquet firmly in their place – and expected to do the same in 1981, but that was counting without the genius of Murray.

Murray's trick system was declared fully legal by the time of the fourth race of the season at Imola in early May. Other teams – including Williams – were forced to scramble to come up with similar devices of their own.

But still Murray and Brabham pushed on. As Henry reported in MN: "Murray's efforts didn't stop [with just the hydropnuemaic suspension]. There was a cunning practice car with carbonfibre brake discs surrounded by the suspicion that it was also under the weight limit. Nobody ever got to the bottom of that mystery – or openly accused Brabham of cheating, which is probably just as well because there was no positive proof."

For all that advantage, Piquet only won three races across the season and went into the showdown in a car park in Las Vegas in a three-way struggle for the crown with Williams' Reutemann and the Ligier-Matra of Jacques Laffite.

While Reutemann went out with a whimper (see sidebar) and Laffite charged up from 12th on the grid to pick up sixth spot, two points and a circumspect fifth place for Piquet – who had passed Reutemann early on in the race – were enough for him to land his first World drivers' title and the first for his team boss Bernie Ecclestone.

It hadn't been without drama though. Piquet wasn't a huge fan of the groundwork that was needed to be done to assure that a driver was in tip-top physical shape to handle a machine on the edge. The searing heat of Nevada, even in October, left the Brazilian on the edge and his head was lolling around in the cockpit over the closing laps. He collapsed with heat exhaustion when he got out of the car. "The championship rather petered out," said MN. "Piquet was too exhausted to acknowledge the cheers of his team or the chequered flag…"

It took everything out of him, but landed him with the ultimate reward. Brabham though, was denied the constructors' crown by Williams. Rebaque in the second Brabham was not match for the combination of Jones, Reutemann and the FW07C.

The FW07C was an updated version of the title-winning FW07B but had been tweaked to cope with the new Michelin rubber the team was using for the first time, having previously extracted the maximum from its Goodyears (although the team would return from the French radials to Goodyear's crossplies in the middle of the campaign).

The Williams was a huge hit while Brabham took time to gets its revolutionary car to work. Two 1-2 finishes for Jones and Reutemann in the opening two races of the year meant that it was business as usual – for the short term, at least.

It battled on manfully to cope with what it thought was an illegal Brabham, and the most serious speedbump in its campaign was a fuel feed problem that robbed Jones of victory at Monaco and struck again at Hockenheim when it was set for a win. As MN put it: "It was the only time that the team's façade looked like cracking. Frank Williams was agitated, Patrick Head's facial expression one of studied thunder and Alan Jones's obvious disappointment was bordering on the homicidal."

The only other time that the car had been off the pace was in practice at Silverstone, after the return to Goodyear tyres, although whether that would have been cured in time for the race was hard to tell as Jones was wiped out in a multi-car accident prompted by Gilles Villeneuve.

Villeneuve and new Ferrari team-mate Didier Pironi were waging war

Williams had a strong start to the campaign but lost its way against the onslaught from the Brabham team

Canadian win kept Laffite in the title hunt

"Williams hoped it would keep up its strong form"

Piquet had to rest before taking the podium

Ferrari's inventive approach to its first turbocharged car helped Villeneuve to a brace of victories

"Renault was a sleeping giant during a difficult year"

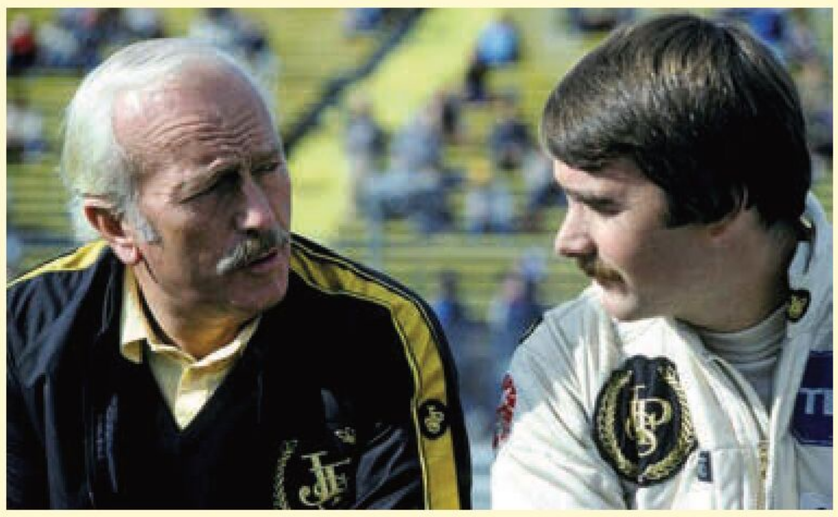
Prost was left to battle with an unrefined Renault

against the *garagistes* from Williams and Brabham. Ferrari was in its first full season with the new-fangled turbo engines, blazing down the path trodden first by Renault. Renault had superior knowledge of turbocharging and used it to better effect than it had 12 months before.

Renault's drivers, Alain Prost and Rene Arnoux, matched 1980's total of three wins throughout the campaign, but this was altogether a more solid season with some flashes of what could be to come. It wasn't without its problems though: the car was overweight and terrible throttle response allied to the handling characteristics of HMS Invincible, which meant that the driving duo scored 14 race finishes from the 29 races they started. There was almost a 50-50 chance of seeing the chequered flag.

But, when it went, the 1.5-litre turbo engine was potent. Prost's finished on the podium in the six races he finished…The future World champion was fifth in the points, while his team-mate was ninth.

But MN was not impressed, despite an upturn in form towards the end of the campaign. We said: "Performances at Montreal and Las Vegas underlined that Renault had got the throttle response well under control, their chassis down to 500kg level and good handling. But they took an amazingly long time to get everything dialled in for success – bear in mind this was the fourth anniversary of the programme's debut…"



THE LOTUS 88: TWIN-CHASSIS TROUBLE FOR BELEAGUERED LOTUS TEAM

Lotus founder and engineering guru Colin Chapman was a formidable opponent, but also a very stubborn one. Jean-Marie Balestre was a domineering head of the governing body, FISA. He, too, was also very stubborn. Cue the Lotus 88 row.

While Brabham found a way through the rules with air suspension, which lowered the BT49C to the point that it would be able to circumnavigate the six-centimetre minimum rideheight rule, Chapman had his own views on how to extract downforce from underneath the contemporary F1 car.

What was effectively a rigid outer chassis had an inner chassis suspended within it, which contained the cockpit and engine. The outer chassis of the Lotus 88 could generate ground effect with its intricate design, without the negative effects that some of the other machines were having on their drivers.

There were howls from rivals when the car first appeared in practice for the Long Beach GP at the start of the year, and it was used in practice only by Elio de Angelis. Cue a raft of eligibility wrangles which led to a nasty showdown at the British Grand Prix between Balestre and Chapman, who had the national governing RAC MSA (which had passed the cars through scrutineering) on side too. They were not allowed to run once and for all and Chapman was effectively threatened with exclusion from the championship if he argued too much. The whole debacle ruined Lotus's season.

As MN reported: "Once the old Lotus 81 had been packed off to the museum, and the Lotus 88 ruled ineligible, Chapman's front-line assault hinged around a hastily convened Lotus 87. This was basically the honeycomb monocoque of the 88 with conventional aerodynamics.

"But the entire Lotus effort didn't seem to radiate the customary energetic sparkle. Arguing the 88's case seemed a full-time business for the Lotus chief – and this showed in the team's performances."

McLaren's revolutionary MP4/1 as introduced midway through the year and shone a light on the future

Patrese and Arrows surprised the establishment after leading from pole position at Long Beach

THE ARGENTINE WHO FELT HE GOT THE ROUGH END OF THE STICK

The 1981 season presented Carlos Reutemann with perhaps his greatest chance to claim the Formula 1 World championship.

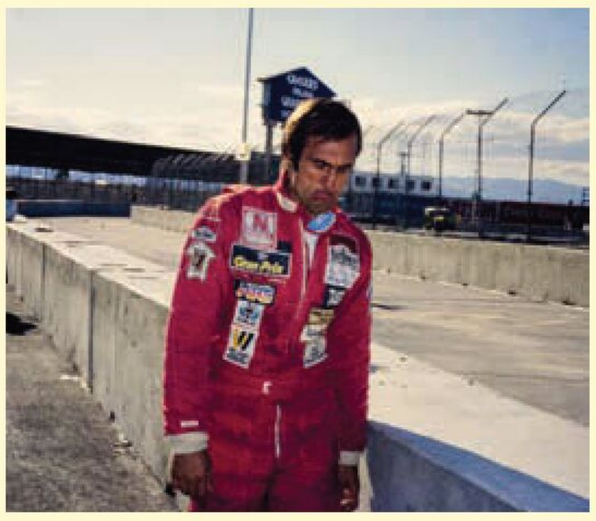
It was the enigmatic Argentine's 10th season in the top-flight, and he had the well sorted Williams FW07C to pedal. Topping first practice for the season's finale at Caesars Palace put a spring in his step, too. Ironically, it was a spring that sent him off track in his chase for the points advantage.

Motoring News posed the question: what had been wrong with Reutemann in Las Vegas that had caused him to whimper out of the title battle with an eighth-placed finish after having started on pole position?

MN reported: "It seemed that Carlos Reutemann's Williams went to the line with stiffer springs and more cross-weights on the rear than [team-mate] Alan Jones's machine. Within half a dozen laps, Reutemann was having difficulty selecting second and third gear. Eventually, fourth gear packed up altogether and he drifted back."

Reutemann lost the title to Nelson Piquet by one point, but even if they pair had tied, he would still have lost due to the countback.

Intriguingly, there was a subplot that meant Retuemann always felt he was on the back foot within his own team. As MN explained: "Reutemann's future plans are still unknown [at the time of writing]. Inwardly, he feels that Williams didn't concentrate its efforts on his championship challenge sufficiently, giving priority to Jones after he 'signed' for 1982 back in July. In retrospect, that seems like a tactical masterstroke on the part of the Australian. There is obvious speculation that this dissatisfaction will result in Reutemann quitting



Williams for 1982. Thus we can expect Frank Williams to redouble his efforts to persuade Alan Jones to change his retirement decision and race on…"

Lotus's season was mired in controversy and the Lotus 87 was a stop-gap machine for the 1981 campaign

While the Renault programme left MN unmoved, Ferrari's maiden campaign with a turbocharged 120-degree V6 left a good impression. The Italians had ditched the early idea of supercharging and went for a twin turbo, and reliability improved from early races after the introduction of a computerised fuel metering system.

But perhaps the most clever trick, unearthed by Motor Sport's Denis Jenkinson, was the use of the turbocharger as an off-throttle turbine from the exhaust gases, which stopped the spindle slowing down too much and gave the 126CK decent throttle response. Evidence of this was clear in Villeneuve's two wins on two of the slowest tracks on the schedule, Monaco and Jarama.

While Pironi raced to 13th in the drivers' standings, Villeneuve was seventh. MN was clearly a fan, as Alan Henry wrote: "Villeneuve is a gifted intuitive racing driver who relishes the thrill of the chase and simply loves winning. An over-riding obsession with the importance of the World championship 'points game' prompts some respective retired champions to brand Villeneuve as foolish. Winning races, however, is important to Gilles. And, with his sort of ability, who is to say that his approach and preference is misguided?"

John Watson was a driver who would later go on to question Villeneuve's approach. The 1981 season was one of transition for McLaren. Ron Dennis was not long in the door and the move to a full carbonfibre tub was being employed. Watson got his hands on one after the first two races, while team-mate Andrea de Cesaris's version came on stream at the midpoint of 1981.

The car was a winner at the British Grand Prix, as you can read in this bookazine, but it was the maiden steps for Dennis, new technology and fledgling Formula 1 designer John Barnard. One of the two chassis was afflicted by a strong bouncing tendency on the straights, which had the team baffled for a large part of the season, but Watson's four podiums on his way to sixth in the points showed the promise. At the final race of the season, MN's news section mentioned a possible future link-up with Porsche as an engine provider too, so that, along with the return of Niki Lauda for 1982, pointed at good things to come.

"MN was clearly a Gilles fan"

Another team yet to take up the turbo route was Ligier. Happy-go-lucky character Laffite was a two-time race winner and in with a shout of the World championship going into that Las Vegas decider, although ultimately came up short and finished in fourth spot in the points.

There were some raised eyebrows when the team decided to revert to the 12-cylinder Matra engine for 1981 after a successful two seasons with the Ford Cosworth DFV. However, 12 years after it had been first introduced, a new fuel metering system cured the powerplant of its Oliver Reed-type thirst and added

Motoring News was not impressed by the Alfa Romeo F1 programme, calling it an "utter disgrace"...

grunt too. The chassis was a fine one also, as many of the Ligiers of that period were. Once Jean-Pierre Jabouille had stepped down from the sister car (which he had taken over from Jean-Pierre Jarier and then handed on to Patrick Tambay), he became the team's technical boss, and his strong relationship with Michelin was to the benefit of both parties. It was enough to help the blue crew to fourth in the constructors' championship.

The story of Lotus is told in our sidebar, but the once-great team was embroiled in so much red tape that it rarely got the best from the machines it finally was able to put on track. Nevertheless, Elio de Angelis was joined by promising Briton Nigel Mansell, who was in for his first full shot at Formula 1.

"Mansell's skill began to shine"

There were some glimpses of pace from Mansell – including a podium at the Belgian Grand Prix – to show that the young charger might have a strong future.

As Henry wrote: "All in all, it was a good solid first year in Formula 1 with flashes of long-term promise for the future. Nigel Mansell is now firmly on the way. If his talent is eventually proved to match his determination, then he should be World champion one day."

A fourth season in F1 for Arrows brought its first pole position at Long Beach for Riccardo Patrese in the year's maiden race, but that was a highlight. Technical and tyre worries delayed the introduction of its new car, the A4 chassis, which would not see the light until 12 months after its intended introduction. Patrese and a patchwork of team-mates soldiered on but only managed eighth in the constructors' battle.

It was also a season of consolidation for Tyrrell. After losing its Candy sponsorship, Eddie Cheever and latterly Michele Alboreto enjoyed the new Maurice Phillippe-penned 011 when it came on stream from the British Grand Prix, but the results weren't spectacular.

Tyrrell did, however, finish level on points with Alfa Romeo. The Italian team had plugged away with its unreliable V12 in an effort described by MN as "utterly disgraceful given its resources and finance".

Those were sentiments probably echoed by drivers Mario Andretti and Bruno Giacomelli.

CALENDAR

Formula 1, 1981

RND	DATE	RACE	VENUE	WINNER (CAR)
1	March 15	US Grand Prix (West)	Long Beach	Alan Jones (Williams)
2	March 29	Brazilian Grand Prix	Jacarepagua	Carlos Reutemann (Williams)
3	April 12	Argentine Grand Prix	Buenos Aires	Nelson Piquet (Brabham)
4	May 3	San Marino Grand Prix	Imola	Nelson Piquet (Brabham)
5	May 17	Belgian Grand Prix	Zolder	Carlos Reutemann (Williams)
6	May 31	Monaco Grand Prix	Monte Carlo	Gilles Villeneuve (Ferrari)
7	June 21	Spanish Grand Prix	Jarama	Gilles Villeneuve (Ferrari)
8	July 5	French Grand Prix	Dijon-Prenois	Alain Prost (Renault)
9	July 18	British Grand Prix	Silverstone	John Watson (McLaren)
10	August 2	German Grand Prix	Hockenheim	Nelson Piquet (Brabham)
11	August 16	Austrian Grand Prix	Osterreichring	Jacques Laffite (Ligier)
12	August 30	Dutch Grand Prix	Zandvoort	Alain Prost (Renault)
13	September 13	Italian Grand Prix	Monza	Alain Prost (Renault)
14	September 27	Canadian Grand Prix	Ile Notre-Dame	Jacques Laffite (Ligier)
15	October 17	Caesars Palace Grand Prix	Las Vegas	Alan Jones (Williams)

Non-championship: February 7, South African Grand Prix, Kyalami. **Winner:** Carlos Reutemann (Williams)

Eddie Cheever: Tyrrell battler

Beppe Gabbiani drove for Osella

Marc Surer scored four points

Lammers and ATS struggled

POINTS

Formula 1 World Championship 1981

POS	DRIVER	CAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	TOTAL
1	Nelson Piquet	Brabham	4	-	9	9	-	-	-	4	-	9	4	6	1	2	2	50
2	Carlos Reutemann	Williams	6	9	6	4	9	-	3	-	6	-	2	-	4	-	-	49
3	Alan Jones	Williams	9	6	3	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	3	4	6	-	9	46
4	Jacques Laffite	Ligier	-	1	-	-	6	4	6	-	4	4	9	-	-	9	1	44
5	Alain Prost	Renault	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	9	-	6	-	9	9	-	6	43
6	John Watson	McLaren	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	6	9	1	1	-	-	6	-	27
7	Gilles Villeneuve	Ferrari	-	-	-	-	3	9	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	DQ	25
8	Elio de Angelis	Lotus	-	2	1	WD	2	-	2	-	1	DQ	-	-	2	3	1	14
9	Rene Arnoux	Renault	-	-	2	-	NQ	-	-	3	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	11
10	Hector Rebaque	Brabham	-	-	-	3	-	NQ	-	-	2	3	-	3	-	-	-	11
11	Riccardo Patrese	Arrows	-	4	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
12	Eddie Cheever	Tyrrell	2	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	3	2	NQ	-	-	-	-	9
13	Didier Pironi	Ferrari	-	-	-	2	-	3	-	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	9
14	Nigel Mansell	Lotus	-	-	-	WD	4	-	1	-	NQ	-	-	-	-	-	3	8
15	Bruno Giacomelli	Alfa Romeo	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4	7

16 Marc Surer (Ensign/Theodore) 4; 17 Mario Andretti (Alfa Romeo) 3; 18 Andrea de Cesaris (McLaren) 1; 19 Patrick Tambay (Theodore/Ligier) 1; 20 Slim Borgudd (ATS) 1; 21 Eliseo Salazar (March/Ensign) 1. **Non-scoring drivers:** Jean-Pierre Jarier (Osella); Siegfred Stohr (Arrows); Derek Daly (March); Chico Serra (Fittipaldi); Keke Rosberg (Fittipaldi); Michele Alboreto (Tyrrell); Brian Henton (Toleman); Jan Lammers (ATS); Ricardo Zuninio (Tyrrell); Piercarlo Ghinzani (Osella); Jean-Pierre Jabouille (Ligier); Beppe Gabbiani (Osella); Derek Warwick (Toleman); Miguel Angel Guerra (Osella); Jacques Villeneuve Sr (Arrows); Kevin Cogan (Tyrrell); Georgio Francia (Osella). **Practice only:** Ricardo Londono (Ensign). **Excluded:** Emilio de Villota (Banco Occidental Williams).

POINTS

A pointless year for Toleman

Constructors' Championship 1981

POS	CAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	TOTAL
1	Williams	15	15	9	4	9	6	3	-	6	-	5	4	10	-	9	95
2	Brabham	4	-	9	12	-	-	-	4	2	12	4	9	1	2	2	61
3	Renault	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	12	-	6	6	9	9	-	6	54
4	Ligier	-	1	-	-	6	4	6	-	4	4	9	-	-	9	1	44
5	Ferrari	-	-	-	2	3	12	9	2	-	-	-	-	2	4	-	34
6	McLaren	-	-	-	1	-	-	4	6	9	1	1	-	-	6	-	28
7	Lotus	-	2	1	WD	6	-	3	1	-	-	-	2	3	1	3	22
8	Arrows	-	4	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
9	Alfa Romeo	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4	10
10	Tyrrell	2	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	10

Other scorers: 11 Ensign 5; 12 Theodore 1; 13 ATS 1. **Non-scoring constructors:** March; Fittipaldi; Osella; Toleman.

BIG PICTURE

Forming an orderly queue behind Gilles's Ferrari...

It was only a rocket-like start that helped Gilles Villeneuve to win the Spanish Grand Prix in 1981. He launched his Ferrari 126CK, which he had qualified a mammoth 1.2s away from pole, from seventh to third at the getaway, and then sliced ahead of the Williams of Carlos Reutemann as the cars began lap two. When leader Alan Jones slid off the track in his Williams, the little Canadian assumed a lead he had no right to keep. He went from lap 14 to lap 80 with a snarling pack of cars behind, only kept at bay by the Ferrari's prodigious straightline grunt. Villeneuve crossed the line 0.2 clear of Jacques Laffite's Ligier and the top five were covered by an astonishing 1.2s.

McLAREN MP4/1: THE MACHINE THAT REVOLUTIONISED GRAND PRIX RACING

Thinking outside the box wasn't unusual for John Barnard, and his foresight changed the face of F1. By **Matt James**

Aerodynamics were clearly something McLaren was exploring at Monaco, with two different wing set-ups here. Watson leads de Cesaris

Formula 1 in 1981 was all about inventiveness, but most of those ideas were about circumnavigating rules. Much of that ingenuity surrounded how to cheat the rideheight regulations and, in that season, it proved to be a success.

The ground effect era was at its height, and the drivers were merely pawns in the game that was them against the extreme forces and designs that the engineers could make them withstand .

But while the endless search for downforce went on, there was a fresh approach in 1981 that would go on to revolutionise Formula 1.

Technology was gathering apace and there were a few engineers who looked outside the traditional car-making methods.

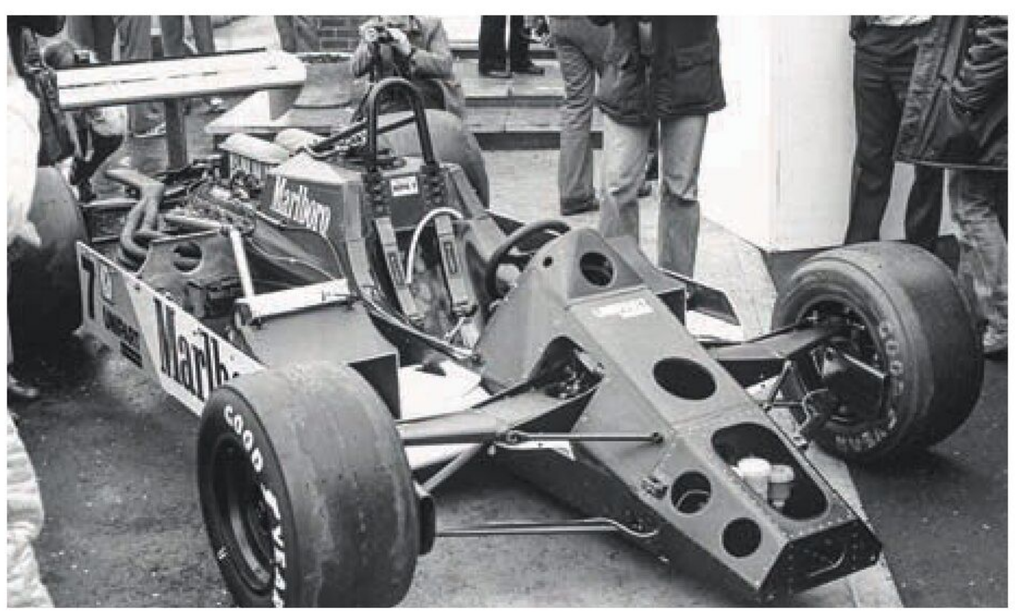
Up until 1981, a grand prix machine would mostly be made from a chassis designed by the engineering guru, from metal, and riveted together. Pick-up points would be welded in, and then so would the engine unit bolts. It was F1 by Meccano in other words.

And then John Barnard, who had been working successful in the USA as a designer for Chaparral on its Indycar projects, was tempted by Ron Dennis to come to Formula 1. Encouraged by the new amalgamation of Marlboro McLaren and Project Four, headed by Dennis, Barnard was given free rein. He realised that the aim of making the cockpit and chassis as light and as strong as possible with its traditional aluminium was going to be fruitless. He had to think outside the box.

Barnard, encouraged by Dennis,

Super-light and super-strong: the Hercules-built monocoque of the MP4/1 was a revelation for Formula 1 designers

McLaren on the up: the new car kick-started British team's rise



Is it strong enough? There were concerns over the new material

jumped on a plane to Salt Lake City to meet with inventive carbonfibre design firm Hercules. It had applied carbonfibre technologies to myriad different projects, and embraced the F1 idea. The new technology of carbonfibre, whose development had been supercharged by the advent of jet travel and was embraced by the Rolls-Royce firm, was lighter and stiffer than anything that had been used before to create a Formula 1 chassis.

By the early spring of 1981, the MP4/1 was born. John Watson and team-mate Andrea de Cesaris had to ride out the first handful of races in the older M29F but Watson was armed with the new weapon by the time the teams took to the grid in Argentina in April.

There was must scoffing from rivals – particularly (and ironically) from Lotus, which had been the king of early ground effect cars. Colin Chapman said the new material was unlikely to be strong enough to withstand a major impact, a theory which Watson would disprove by the end of the campaign with a monster shunt at Monza.

The chassis wasn't free from imperfections, and there were some developments still to come that would be incorporated into later models. Indeed, the properties of the new super-light material meant that Barnard could be even more bold when penning future chassis.

Even though the first one wasn't perfect, the MP4/1 showed its worth with a win at Silverstone in Watson's hands. Sixth in the constructors' points for McLaren might seem like nothing to shout about, but it made a big noise among the future direction for design in Formula 1. McLaren and Barnard left the others rushing to play catch up.

BATTLE FOR CONTROL

In 1981, Formula 1 was affected by the warring factions of FISA and FOCA. One claimed to represent the sport, the other the teams. Both wanted power, explains **David Addison**

Williams's Carlos Reutemann tries to work out how the rival Brabham team is so fast...

There are many adjectives to describe Bernie Ecclestone, and one popular one was 'ringmaster'. In 1981, however, he was still Brabham team principal first and a nascent promoter second. He could see the potential that Formula 1 had, especially through television, and how FISA, the sport's governing body, was stifling progress.

Ecclestone was incredibly savvy. He could see that the teams were largely amateur racing teams, not well-run commercial businesses and he set up FOCA (Formula One Constructors' Association) to represent the teams' interests. Against FOCA was FISA and the manufacturers, namely Alfa Romeo, Renault and Ferrari, aligned themselves to the sport's governing body and its autocratic leader Jean-Marie Balestre.

The so-called FISA/FOCA war began in 1980 when things came to a head. The FOCA teams accused FISA of showing bias towards the manufacturer teams in terms of enforcing regulations and also blamed FISA for poor commercial management. To make their point, the FOCA teams advised its drivers to boycott the newly instigated 45-minute compulsory driver briefings at which Balestre would hold court like a pompous headmaster. The FOCA drivers boycotted the briefings at Monaco and Zolder at which point FISA issued fines that the teams and drivers refused to pay. FISA then threatened to suspend those drivers' licences before the Spanish Grand Prix at which point the Spanish race organiser offered to pay the fines to make sure the race went ahead. FISA refused, saying that the drivers must pay them and therefore humiliating an admission of guilt from them. The King of Spain intervened, saying that the race would go ahead, and the organisers bypassed the Spanish motoring federation aligned to FISA. That meant that the race was no longer subject to FISA's regulations, but in turn after the race (which ran without the manufacturers), FISA refused to award points, as it had been an 'illegal' race, not sanctioned by the sport's governing body.

Relations between Ecclestone and Balestre were reaching freezing point.

While the arguments over points continued, Ecclestone was trying to garner support from race organisers for his commercial will, and in the main the British teams were content to follow him. The continental teams were less convinced, so Osella and Ligier (now with French Talbot money) joined the FISA gang.

"Ecclestone was a thorn in the side of Balestre"

Ecclestone fought fire with fire, setting up the World Federation of Motorsport in November 1980 to stage a rival championship in a bid to make Balestre become more compliant. The FOCA teams were also very unhappy that FISA had decided to ban skirts, the aerodynamic aids that gave cars more downforce and speed, and as Ecclestone and Balestre butted heads, delay after delay came to forming a calendar for 1981. Ecclestone's formation of the WFMS didn't help but it soon became clear to him that he wouldn't get the agreement of enough organisers (oh, how times changed...) and he had to give up on the project, although Balestre had certainly had a wake-up call. This diminutive Englishman was a very sharp thorn in his side...

It was October 1980 when the 1981 calendar was agreed, and the date for

the South African Grand Prix was planned for February 7, but Ecclestone's plans (or threat) for a breakaway series and the bickering that went with it caused the Argentine Grand Prix to be scrapped as its January date was just too soon. FISA realised that the South African race was unlikely to happen given the FISA/FOCA arguments, so decided to postpone the race until April. In typical Balestre fashion, no discussion was entertained, just a telex sent.

This gave the South African organisers a significant number of problems. For a start, they had begun promoting the event for the original date with tickets printed, posters already on display and a sponsor, Nashua, committed to the date. Equally, April was not a good idea in South Africa as weather conditions could be very bad and make the race torrentially wet. That was one reason why the original date had been planned for February…so, the South Africans went back to FISA and complained and FISA wasted no time in ignoring them! 'That is your date,' they said. 'Take it or leave it.'

Interestingly, the telex sent from FISA on January 9 1981 advising the South African Motor Racing Club of this news contained a paragraph quoting article 237 of the Yellow Book, FISA's tome of rules and regulations. It said that the only way that the South African Grand Prix could go ahead on the February date was if it ran as a Formula Libre event, outside of the World championship. If that was meant to be a threat, it failed spectacularly. Kyalami Enterprises, the event promoter, had signed a deal with FOCA for that date and thus the phone lines to Ecclestone were busy.

The race would go ahead, but let's just address one more point. People call the '81 South African Grand Prix a non-championship F1 race. Technically, it wasn't. As the cars ran with skirts, which FISA had outlawed for 1981, the cars didn't comply with F1 regulations and weren't Formula 1 cars to the strictest letter of the regulations. Therefore, to be correct it should be referred to as a Formula Libre race. Whatever it was, it had repercussions.

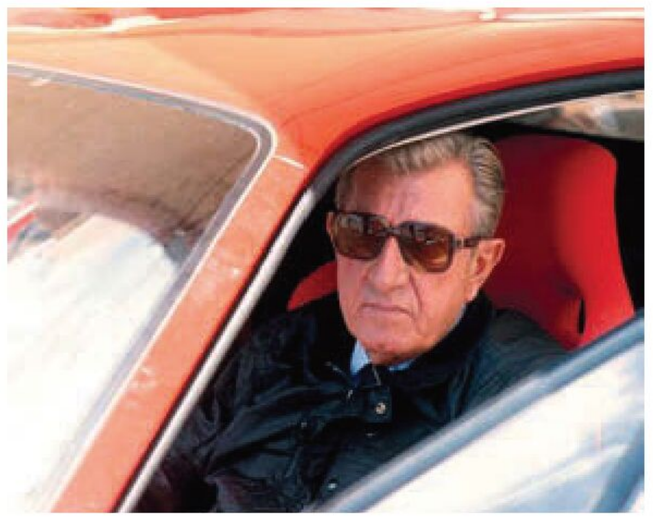
Nineteen cars arrived for the Nashua Grand Prix of South Africa. As the teams rolled into the paddock, the next problem reared its head, which was surrounding tyres. As this was a non-championship/Formula Libre race, F1's official tyre supplier Goodyear wasn't allowed to be there. To get around that problem, Goodyear did a deal with the International Racing Tyre Service, the company that was set to distribute Avon tyres in the European season, and used its stocks of Goodyear rubber. Where there's a will, there's a way…

Otherwise the field was small, and of mainly British teams with only the German-owned ATS team siding with FOCA, qualifying was a serious affair with Nelson Piquet's Brabham BT49 bagging pole from the Williams FW07s of Carlos Reutemann and Alan Jones while fourth was Keke Rosberg in the quicker Fittipaldi F8C in a hint of what might have been had skirts been retained for the season. Reutemann won the race from Piquet and Elio de Angelis (Lotus 81) as reigning World champion Jones retired after 62 of the 77 laps with, of all things, a loose skirt.

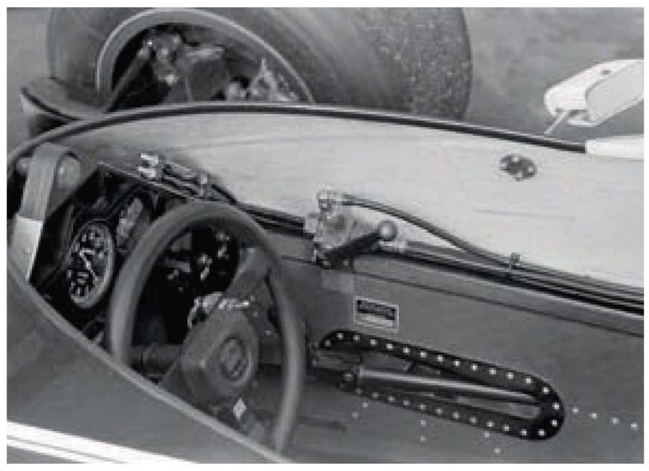
Had the race been a World championship race, Reutemann's nine points would have given him the title

Garagistes have a conflab: Williams's Patrick Head (l) talks to Brabham's Gordon Murray (r)

"FISA informed the teams by telex…"


Man not for moving: Jean Marie Balestre

Desire Wilson raced in home Grand Prix



Brabham had a ‘special’ secret lever…

at year-end, but that is a slightly fatuous argument given that the Renaults, Ferraris, Alfas and even Osella could have played a part in bagging points as well, but it was one to discuss.

What was discussed after the race was the future. Each side claimed a victory. FOCA had got away with it certainly and put on a race of 19 cars whereas a World championship grid was capped at 24 after qualifying. That in itself was impressive. Ecclestone’s strength had been shown as well and his ability to deal with organisers and suppliers was highlighted. Balestre now realised that here was a man to be wary of.

FISA’s stance was that it had won. After all, Ecclestone didn’t get a full grid and the big teams hadn’t been there, with the draw of Ferrari not being available to FOCA nor to fans. What was clear was that two-thirds of a grid did not make a true World championship race and that boycotting a grand prix meant that car-makers like Renault, Ferrari and Alfa Romeo missed out on masses of television time. We aren’t talking airtime as we know it in 2021 but it was still a significant amount even back then.

But still Balestre didn’t accept that a compromise was needed. He seemed happy for the championship to implode until FOCA was brought to heel but the next races were looming. One was in America, the popular and charismatic Long Beach Grand Prix on the streets of California. For Renault, this was an important race as car sales in the USA were increasing and vital to survival. Something needed to be done.

It was Renault that dragged FISA to the negotiating table and ultimately a resolution was found, with FISA

DIscussing a way through the impasse: Balestre (left) and Bernie’s legal man Max Mosley

Only crisis talks prompted by Renault saved the 1981 United States GP at Long Beach

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Frank Williams was happy to follow FOCA boss Ecclestone who was changing the sport

keeping its will to ban skirts but FOCA keeping control of the commercial side of the sport. Ecclestone would continue to exploit that and ultimately sell Brabham and concentrate on running Formula 1 as a business making millions in the process. Balestre was less than pleased that it one of 'his' teams that instigated the negotiation process as the Frenchman thought he had the battle won. Instead he lost a certain amount of face to Ecclestone and it also meant that, ultimately, he had to agree to the ratification of hydraulic suspension and fixed skirts in order to keep the FOCA teams on side. At a stroke, he undid all the winter testing of the FISA teams who had run without skirts and did a volte face on his own decision to ban them in the first place. And, for a man who claimed that safety was his motive, he created cars more dangerous than before with their rock-hard suspension. It also pushed up costs as teams suddenly had to create a hydraulic suspension or equivalent and spend yet more on testing. It wasn't F1's finest moment.

Ecclestone had another key strength, not just his own negotiating skills, but also a very solid legal counsel. Max Mosley, amateur racer and one of the founders of the March racing car constructor, joined Ecclestone as FOCA's legal adviser and he and Ecclestone made a formidable partnership. They were like oil and water but yet their relationship was rock solid and the partnership grew in strength and stature. Mosley was one of the architects of the Concorde Agreement and ultimately would channel his political ambitions into motorsport. Mosley commented later that: "We were absolutely skint. If Balestre could have held the manufacturer's support for a little bit longer, the constructors would have been on their knees. The outcome would then have been very different."

As it was, the fact that the race had gone ahead with worldwide television meant that Balestre had to bend a little, but the formidable Ecclestone-Mosley alliance meant that he almost caved in.

The document that enabled grand prix racing to move forward was the Concorde Agreement that forced FISA and FOCA, and their supporting teams, to agree and become of one union. FISA agreed to a more equal distribution of funds to the teams both large and small, as well as arbitration provisions and it agreed to a timetable for any technical rule changes instead of them being introduced at will. For their part, the teams agreed to enter every race, which had not been a stipulation before and why some races did better for entries than others with flyaways being hit most. The teams agreed to abide by the regulations set out by FISA and to share travel costs among the teams that scored points in a season. There was another negative to all of the bickering which was that Goodyear pulled out of F1 and the teams now had to adapt to a new tyre. Neither FISA nor FOCA could claim that Goodyear's withdrawal was a positive step as it had been one of the most loyal supporters.

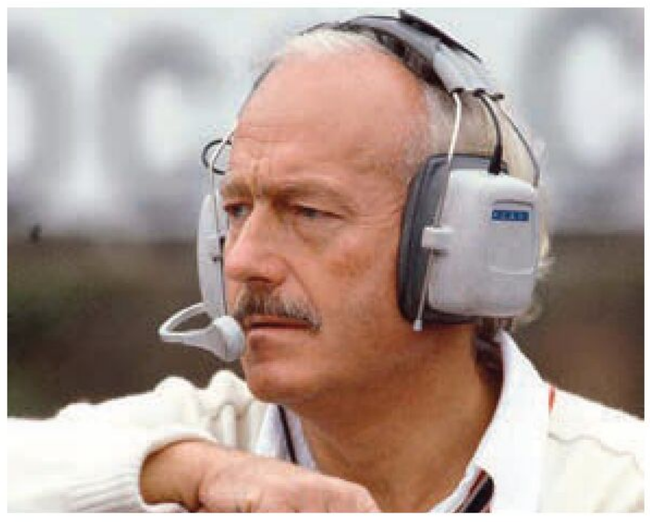
It was an interesting side note that having agreed to the technical regulations laid down by FISA, the first team to exploit the wording and return to a skirted car was Brabham, under Ecclestone's leadership. Just as the cars in that South Africa race had been effectively illegal, so were the cars on the track for the bulk of 1981. Only when they pitted and raised their rideheight were they truly in compliance with the regulations and by mid-season every team had adopted a similar system in order to remain competitive.

However, peace hadn't broken out completely as there was another fight in 1982 when FOCA teams boycotted the San Marino Grand Prix after drivers earlier in the season were excluded for using the cars' water tanks as ballast to keep them under the weight regulations. The FOCA teams boycotted the race, won by Didier Pironi, although, as FISA teams were on the grid, it counted for points...

Look back on the period and it was one that did F1 no favours but it was a battle Ecclestone relished and ultimately won. Balestre continued to be a rulemaker, Ecclestone the promoter and F1 soared in popularity and exposure as a result. On the back of that, many in F1 became wealthy albeit not as rich as Ecclestone himself.

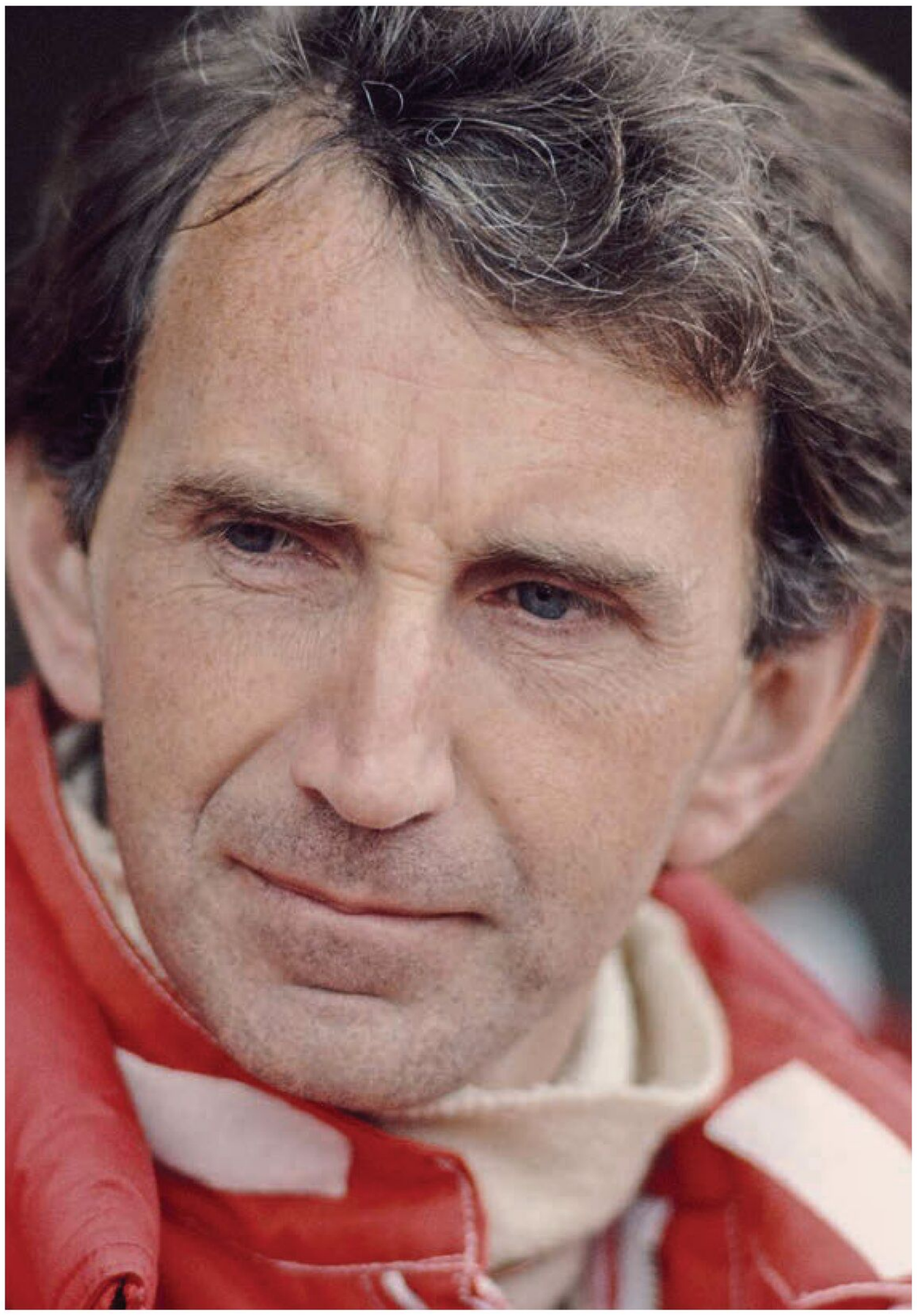
In 2008, things almost came full circle when the teams threatened to break away from Ecclestone. He won that battle, too...

"It was a period that did F1 no favours"


Colin Chapman allied Lotus to FOCA side

THE UNEXPECTED WIN

John Watson won the British Grand Prix in 1981 against expectations. He recalls the win with **David Addison**



The British Grand Prix in 1981 delivered a unlikely win for McLaren's John Watson

When British fans poured through the gates of Silverstone on Saturday, July 18 1981, little did they expect the result they got. Silverstone was a power circuit and turbo-engined Renaults locked out the front row of the grid. It was a race won by John Watson in his McLaren MP4/1 after a race that came to him as others hit trouble.

Watson went to Silverstone after third at Jarama in Spain and then second at Dijon for the French GP, so there was an element of a pattern. Much as Watson may have hoped for a win, the odds seemed against it. He had qualified fifth, a little frustrated as he had hoped for pole position but said, at the time, that the car was "not as good as I would have expected it to be for no apparent reason." The third row was his reward, this in the days when two qualifying sessions were run and you counted your better time from either session. That put him behind poleman Rene Arnoux with

Keeping the home fires burning: Watson picks up the trophy after a truly epic effort

Renault team-mate Alain Prost alongside. Nelson Piquet's normally-aspirated Cosworth-engined Brabham lined up third ahead of the faster Ferrari, that of Didier Pironi, with Wattie and his team-mate Andrea de Cesaris next.

When the race started, Prost bolted into the lead with Pironi behind. Gilles Villeneuve in the second Ferrari ran third but in his desperation to overtake the Frenchman, delayed himself and allowed Arnoux to move ahead into third. Watson dropped back on the opening lap but was soon looking to make a move on reigning World champion Alan Jones (Williams FW07C) when the race had a major drama.

On lap four, Villeneuve affected the race hugely. He lost it coming out of the fast Woodcote chicane and in the smoke created by his spinning Ferrari, Jones crashed out too. Next in the queue was Wattie, who stood on the anchors. He missed the drama ahead, but was millimetres away from being wiped out himself as de Cesaris was directly behind him and crashed in avoidance.

Watson had a clear opinion of how things happened: "I described Villeneuve as acting like a hyperactive child, with the car on the locks one way and then the other! Gilles was a racer, he wasn't a thinking driver like others, he was a racer and he drove a shit car above and beyond its capacity but finally the shit car had its say! It said: 'I'm in charge, learn to respect me!' Eventually the inevitable happened and he lost it."

Watson stood on the brakes as hard as could. He missed Jones but lost the engine.

"When the smoke cleared, I was rolling but because I had braked so hard, the engine had stalled so I got it in the right gear and flicked the electric pump to fire up the engine. I had the presence of mind to do that, bump-started the car and set off," he says. "I don't know if that was an instinctive thing or if you just put it down to experience, but I just did it and away I went."

"I had to brake so hard I lost the engine"

De Cesaris was less fortunate and ploughed into the catch fencing. Watson says: "Had he had more experience he would have been looking through the accident, not at my gearbox! He turned sharp left and almost clipped the back of my car although I didn't realise that at the time."

Watson had fallen down the pack as the field streamed past. His first task was to move ahead of a freight train comprising of Mario Andretti (Alfa Romeo 179C), the second Alfa of Bruno Giacomelli and Wattie's 1980 team-mate Patrick Tambay (Ligier JS17). Tambay said at the time that: "All I could see was John coming back on to the circuit off the grass and I thought he must have had a moment on his own, but soon he

WATSON BGP 1981

Watson started the British Grand Prix in fifth position, but was caught up in a melee sparked by Villeneuve's Ferrari and dropped back

came steaming past me again."

Once he had cleared that pack, he had to repass Carlos Reutemann's Williams FW07C and then Piquet's Brabham had a tyre go down and he slammed into the sleepers at Becketts. Wattie was third, with just the two yellow Renaults ahead.

Prost hit trouble on 18, the turbo failing on the Renault RE30 which left Arnoux's sister car in the lead with Watson chasing.

And chase he did, the new carbonfibre McLaren setting impressive lap times. For that, Watson puts much of the credit to the tyres.

"We were on Michelin radial-ply tyres," says Watson. "If you look at a cross-ply tyre like the Goodyears, they grow and lift the car slightly which allows downforce to forced out from underneath and affect the potential. On our Michelins, the growth was negligible, so we were better than, say, Williams on Goodyears. The car was doing everything that I wanted it to do and I was able to brake late and gain places and the car was beautifully balanced."

"I could see the gap was narrowing"

Arnoux set the fastest lap on 50 of 68 as he edged closed to a win, but no sooner had he done so than the Renault's engine started to sound a little rough. Andretti (Alfa Romeo), who had just gone a lap down, stayed with the Renault and then unlapped himself meaning that it was clear that Arnoux was in trouble. Wattie soon got the message in those rudimentary days of just a pitboard telling you the gaps to the cars around you.

"There was no ship-to-shore [radio] in those days," remembers Watson. "It was just a man hangin' over the pitwall with a board showing the gaps. It was a plus or minus to the car ahead in this case so I could see the numbers coming down."

The crowd, perhaps dazed by Arnoux's perceived dominance, suddenly stirred. The fans could also see a gap diminishing and were soon throwing their support behind the Northern Irishman.

"The gap was coming down in chunks. I was taking two and sometimes three seconds a lap out of his gap and it wasn't long before I was up with him. I caught Arnoux who was having turbo problems, and made a move into Copse, but I shouldn't have done really. I got my momentum back on the way into Becketts and went for it. He was resigned to it, because but he was down on horsepower. Eventually his turbo let go, like Prost's. To this day, that little prick will tell me, 'You

The home fans spurred on Watson in his McLaren over the hectic second half of the race

didn't win that race, I lost it.' He is a sore loser…"

Once ahead, Watson wasn't about to relax. He had come close to a win at Dijon in 1977, only for his Brabham to splutter for fuel at the very end. He couldn't be so unlucky again, surely?

"Ron Dennis, the McLaren boss, was on the pitwall telling me to slow down, but the car was so easy to drive, I was still going quickly," says Watson. "For a racing driver when you have a rhythm, it is hard to slow down and break that rhythm. I started to reduce the revs, changed up earlier, and I was still being told to slow down! So I dropped the revs at bit more, and it only made two or three-tenths a lap! Ron was having kittens on the pitwall. I put my blinkers on. I had Ron telling me to slow, Dijon '77 in my mind, when I led the whole race and coughed for fuel on the last lap and was passed by Andretti, but I tried not to let those thoughts enter my mind. When I passed the chequered flag, I didn't punch the air, and I just put my hand up less

The Northern Irishman gave an understated wave as he acknowledged the race victory

WATSON BGP 1981

The McLaren wasn't expected to be the pacesetter at turbocharger-friendly Silverstone track

Renaults lead the way, Rene Arnoux from Alain Prost, while Watson is way down the queue

Watson's victory was the launchpad for huge success for McLaren in grand prix racing

demonstrably than others. Ron didn't bollock me, by the way, because he was happy! We'd just won, after all."

If Watson was delighted, and Dennis relieved, the crowd was ecstatic.

"When I was closing on Arnoux I wasn't really looking at anything else, but once I was ahead, I had 10 or 11 laps to go, Into my mind came Dijon 1977, so I was thinking, 'You've not won yet'. Then, going into Stowe, I could see something going on," says Watson. "The fans were responding to me, but it was something I had never experienced, although I had seen it for James Hunt. I was trying not to let it lull me into a false sense of security. I call it a people's victory! Forty years on, people might see me at an airport and ask: 'Are you John Watson? I was at Silverstone in '81 and had a fantastic day.' It wasn't expected, I certainly wasn't the favourite to win. That is why when the fans started to react, it was a reaction from the heart."

For Watson, his second career win had been a long time coming after Austria in 1976 and it relieved him of a lot of pressure after a difficult 1980 season in which the McLaren was largely uncompetitive.

"When I crossed the line, I thought: 'Thank God'," remembers Wattie. "Certain elements of the media were happy to write me off but it was more for the people in McLaren that had made it possible, because it isn't just me, it was all the people who had worked on the car and all the people that had worked on bringing Ron and John into the team. My family was there, but I can't remember how long after the race we met up."

Straight away, there were demands for the race winner. Interviews, autographs, more interviews and more autographs. In the days before post-race press conferences, Watson stood on Silverstone's familiar podium at Woodcote Corner, scene of the early-race drama, suddenly the man of the moment. There was a lap of honour for the top three drivers: Watson, Reutemann and Jacques Laffite, although Argentine Reutemann didn't bother to join in.

"He was pissed off that I'd passed him, not once but twice," grins Wattie. "I couldn't believe what I was seeing though. All these people were on the track and cheering and they were cheering for me. Even now it gives me goosebumps thinking back to it all."

Watson had flown into Silverstone that morning from Kidlington, but getting home was less easy and far less glamorous.

"I missed the flight back to Kidlington because I was so busy signing autographs so in the end I got a taxi back to Kidlington to pick up my car. I didn't feel like a grand prix winner! I had done my job, like Dennis always said. I went to this party and when I arrived it was nearly 2300hrs and everyone was shit-faced and I was sober. They told me to get the barbecue on and that was that!"

It was a crucial win for Watson but also for Dennis and the marketing men at Philip Morris, owners of tobacco brand Marlboro. They had seen the malaise that McLaren was in under the management of Teddy Mayer and parachuted in Dennis and ace designer John Barnard. Barnard in turn created the light but strong MP4, revolutionary in its carbonfibre construction, but the pressure was on to deliver a win. On McLaren's home soil, now a British team although founded by Kiwi Bruce McLaren, Watson's result was perfectly timed. Watson may have taken the credit, but was quick to recognise the efforts of those that had made it possible.

He says: "Ron had ambition and vision and in 1981 I got a call from him to summon me to a psychologist called Edward de Bono, to see how he could get more out of me. It was Ron's way of making the most out of every element of the package. He looked at things in a different way and things that people wouldn't have thought of. He did an outstanding job and I am very pleased that I was able to play my part in that success."

Third then second... Millimetres away from being caught up with Jones in the Woodcote accident, millimetres away from being hit by de Cesaris. One Renault out, then Piquet, then the second Renault. Family present. Everything seemed to fall Watson's way. Was it pre-ordained? "That depends on what philosophical view you have, but all I know is that it worked out for me. I had had some bad luck, so maybe it was my turn for better fortunes, maybe it was everyone else's day for bad luck, but certainly things went well for me."

Five years of hard slog after winning in Austria '76 for Penske evaporated. All that disappointment ebbed away as John stood atop the Silverstone podium, the darling of the crowd.

Forty years later, Watson remembers the race as though it were yesterday. It was his day of days and his most memorable win. Three more grand prix wins followed, some after better drives, but none as important as Silverstone 1981.

"Certain media had written me off"

MOVING FORWARD

Technology was becoming more of a factor in circuit racing in 1981. **David Addison** looks back

The yellow car steamed down the Silverstone pitlane. Again. It had become such a regular occurrence that weekend that the sniggering cynics dubbed the new, turbocharged Renault 'The Yellow Teapot'. By 1981, that laughter was more of a nervous nature as the teams could see the writing on the wall. Normally-aspirated engines were on borrowed time.

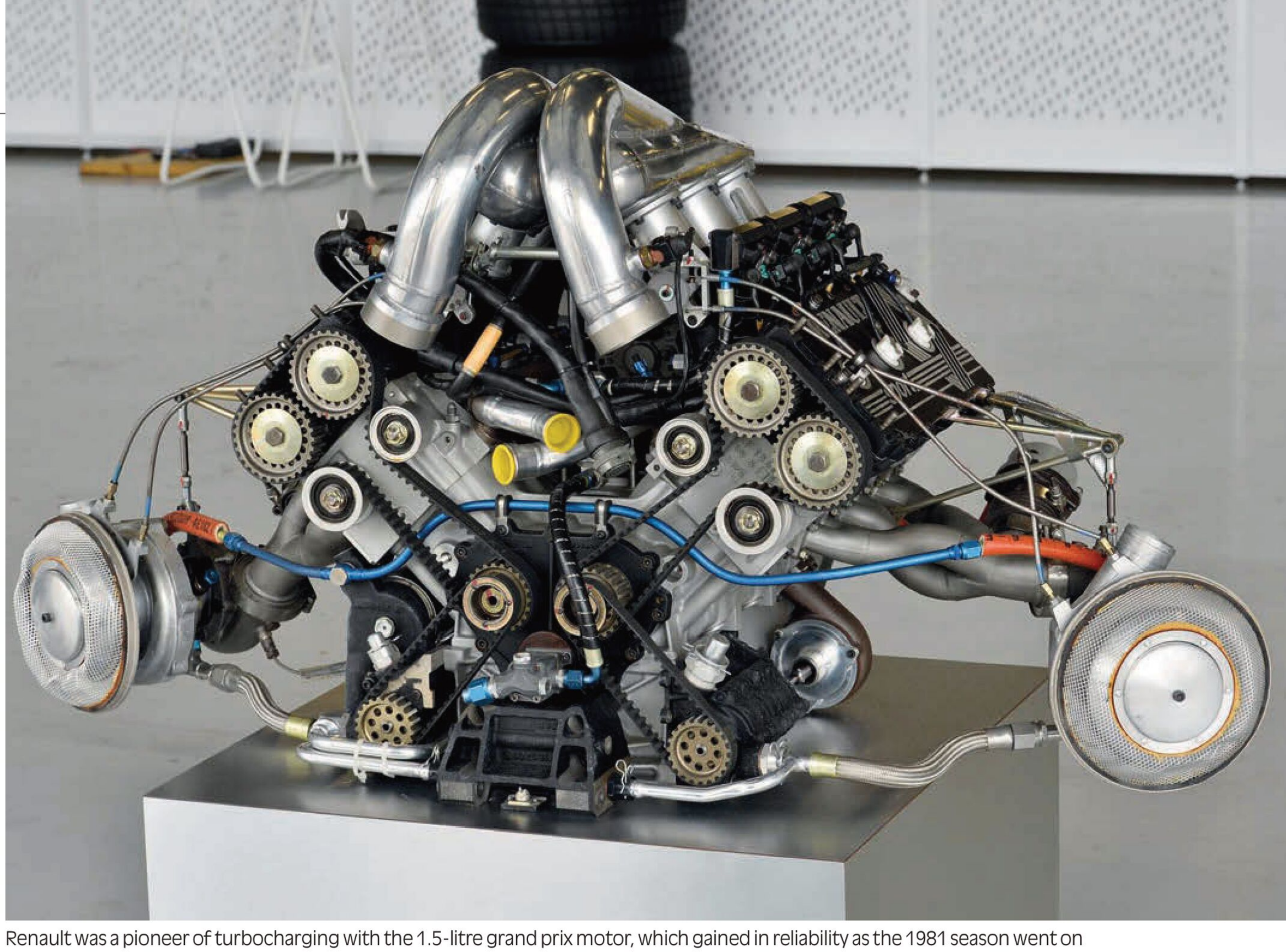
Renault pioneered the turbo revolution in 1977 and by 1979 scored its first win at Dijon. Jean-Pierre Jabouille claimed honours for the marque and Ferrari soon looked at turbo power as well, taking the step for 1981. The downside to the powerful engines was that reliability was still an issue so that when the cars held together they were very fast, but more often than not the turbos would go pop. That gave the Cosworth DFV-powered teams hope, and indeed on some circuits the turbo lag was such an issue that the Cosworth teams were back in the fight anyway.

There was another area in which technology was changing, and that was down to Colin Chapman's fertile imagination. The Lotus boss devised the skirt, a device added to the sidepods of his cars that prevented air from getting out from underneath, thus sucking the car down on to the ground and hence making it go faster. Speeds went up, the cars became harsher to drive and drivers started to dislike them. FISA, the sport's governing body, stepped in and banned skirts, but wrote the regulations so sloppily that Brabham's Gordon Murray found a loophole. The cars were mandated to have a six-centimetre rideheight that would be checked when the cars came into the pitlane, but obviously couldn't be checked on the track. Murray came up with a hydraulic system that allowed the drivers to raise the car when they pitted and then drop it down again when on the circuit, hence going back to the so-called ground-effect style. All the teams had to follow suit and introduce their own systems, which had the effect of introducing rock-

Lotus and Colin Chapman waged war with officialdom over the controversial 88 design

Ground clearance: other teams, like Ferrari, were left without trick suspension systems

> **"When the turbos went they were fast"**



Renault was a pioneer of turbocharging with the 1.5-litre grand prix motor, which gained in reliability as the 1981 season went on

Formula Talbot was a product of the worldwide energy crisis which struck in 1980

Ferrari was another team with a turbo

hard springs and an even harsher ride, plus the farcical sight of 24 illegal cars on the track becoming legal when they pitted. It painted F1 in a poor light…

Chapman, the man who had started the ground-effect revolution, had already moved on to his next idea. The Lotus 88 came to the scrutineers with 'twin chassis' which was really a conventionally-sprung monocoque and floating bodywork and was a better solution to the rideheight problem and a safer one, too. FISA promptly banned it. It was re-presented at Silverstone where the so-called twin chassis terminology had been replaced by the phrase two 'sprung structures' and the RAC MSA, the event organisers, accepted it as legal. Chapman went home to upgrade three Lotus 87s to 88s and three other teams complained to FISA. The governing body overruled the RAC and the 88s were declared illegal after all.

On a separate note, there was something different happening in the UK. Born out of the worldwide energy crisis in 1980, Formula Talbot was launched in 1980 by John Webb, one of the brains behind Formula Ford 1600. The key difference here was that methanol, rather than petrol, was used and the Talbot 1600cc twin carburettor Ti engine was the base engine. The cars generated 140mph, and Prime Minister's son Mark Thatcher on the grid aided media coverage, but grids were modest and the concept didn't catch on.

Forty years later and motorsport would be discussing hybrid and electrification…

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Jules

BIG PICTURE

Getting ready to head into the history books

Front-row sitter Jochen Mass, who was sharing with Vern Schuppan and Hurley Haywood, leads away at the beginning of the warm-up lap to start the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1981. With sportscar racing in a fragmented state, the focus was on the bigger one-off races like Daytona and Le Mans. Porsche didn't take the decision to enter Le Mans until the April before the event and, with the pre-event test cancelled, it was a journey into the unknown. The polesitting sister car, number 11 in the hands of Jacky Ickx and Derek Bell, would go on to dominate.

A FALTERING START TO A NEW DAWN FOR SPORTSCAR RACING

Matt James reflects on a season where the drivers' crown was fought out on different sides of the world

Left: Lancia won the Makes title from the classes, while Bob Garretson, above on his way to victory at Daytona, won the drivers' crown

It might be easy to think of Lancia's time in sportscar racing as a glorious failure. The Italian firm produced some of the best-looking cars to grace the long-distance grid, but the rewards in terms of silverware were minimal. Its only noteworthy success came with the Beta Monte Carlo, which took the second of its back-to-back global manufacturers' titles in 1981, albeit from the smaller-engined divisions.

Rulemakers were struggling to map out a future for sportscar racing, and Group C was being drawn up in the background. So that meant that the heavy metal at the front of the sportscar grid in 1981 was mostly older cars that had every upgrade to engines and chassis that they could to squeeze every last ounce of performance out of them. It was a season of treading water, but Lancia dived right in to pick up the trophy.

The World Championship of Makes, which had been instituted in 1972 (when the big five-litre monsters such as the Porsche 917s and the Ferrari 512s had been outlawed) had been the biggest prize in long-distance sport.

Since 1978 the winner of the Makes title was the firm that had scored best across either the under-2000cc division and the flagship over-2000cc division. Lancia's Beta Monte Carlo had been beaten on-track in 1980 by, among others, the Porsche 935 and the Porsche 936, but it was focused on its class competition. It did enough and, despite a tie-break with Porsche, the Italians claimed the prize with six class wins compared to five for the Germans.

The Beta Monte Carlo had been introduced in 1979 and was a proven product by the time the endurance racing landscape was overhauled for 1981.

The first significant alteration for the sportscar scene is that it was christened the World Endurance Championship. The previous World Challenge for Endurance Drivers became the World Endurance Championship for Drivers and was fought out over 15 rounds. The World Championship for Makes became the World Endurance Championship for Makes and there would be six scoring rounds including the Le Mans 24 Hours in June.

"Lancia's works effort was not a failure"

Lancia's spectacular driver roster included up-and-coming Formula 1 drivers Eddie Cheever, Riccardo Patrese, Piercarlo Ghinzani, Andrea de Cesaris and Michele Alboreto, and they were joined by the likes of Hans Heyer, Beppe Gabbiani, Carlo Facetti and Henri Pescarolo. But, as it was competing in a division where only the manufacturers claimed points – unlike the over 2000cc class – the drivers' individual efforts would go unrewarded.

It's maybe just as well that they weren't in the frame for the overall drivers' title, as the official works Martini-backed factory squad and its 1.4-litre turbocharged cars performed in a very Lancia-type way in the opening rounds of the contest. Reliability, including losing a wheel at Silverstone, meant that it was often left to the privateer teams such as Jolly Club to pick up the pieces and keep the points tally ticking over. There was no other significant opposition in the under-2000cc class

Gerretston was tempted to the European side of the Atlantic for the Le Mans 24 Hours

but Lancia needed to keep up the pressure if it was to topple Porsche, which stretched its legs in the bigger class.

The manufacturer interest in the series centred around the six points-paying races for the Makes class, meaning that it was open season for the drivers' contest.

It was the first time that a drivers' crown had been awarded for international long-distance racing, but the newness of the award and the scattergun approach of the schedule – which included the saloon-based Spa 24 Hours among a sprinkling of IMSA races as well as the headline European events – meant that it was hard for a driver to put together a sustained attack.

It was a turning of the tide in sportscar racing. Although this opening season was a bit-part affair in terms of entries, it laid down the foundations for drivers becoming as important as the machines they were driving in the endurance tests.

With the official teams – Lancia, Porsche and BMW – only contesting the reduced roster, the drivers' champion came from a privateer team: American Bob Garreston in the Porsche 935.

His self-run Garretson Racing Porsche 935 K3 – a more powerful and lighter iteration of the original 935 – started the season strongly with a victory at the Daytona 24 Hours, where the American shared with countryman Bobby Rahal and Brit Brian Redman. Rahal should have been in the machine for the rest of the season, but a break-up in ownership of the team after Le Mans left Garretson relying on guns for hire for the majority of the rest of his season.

After four of the opening 10 driver-counting rounds in North America, Garretson and chief title rival Harald Grohs (who was piloting an Andial Meister Racing Porsche 935, mainly alongside Rolf Stommelen) were then fighting for the same honours but virtually on the other sides of the Atlantic Ocean in different points-paying events. Grohs won the Silverstone round alongside Walter Rohrl and Dieter Schornstein in his Porsche and then it all came together again at Le Mans in June. Garretson, sharing with Anne-Charlotte Verney and Ralph Kent-Cooke, finished in sixth spot, four places clear of Grohs, who was partnering Gotz Tschirnhaus and Dieter Schornstein.

Garretson even switched to a Mazda RX-3 for the production-based Daytona 6 Hours in July in his efforts to keep up the points pressure but was thwarted by a driveshaft failure.

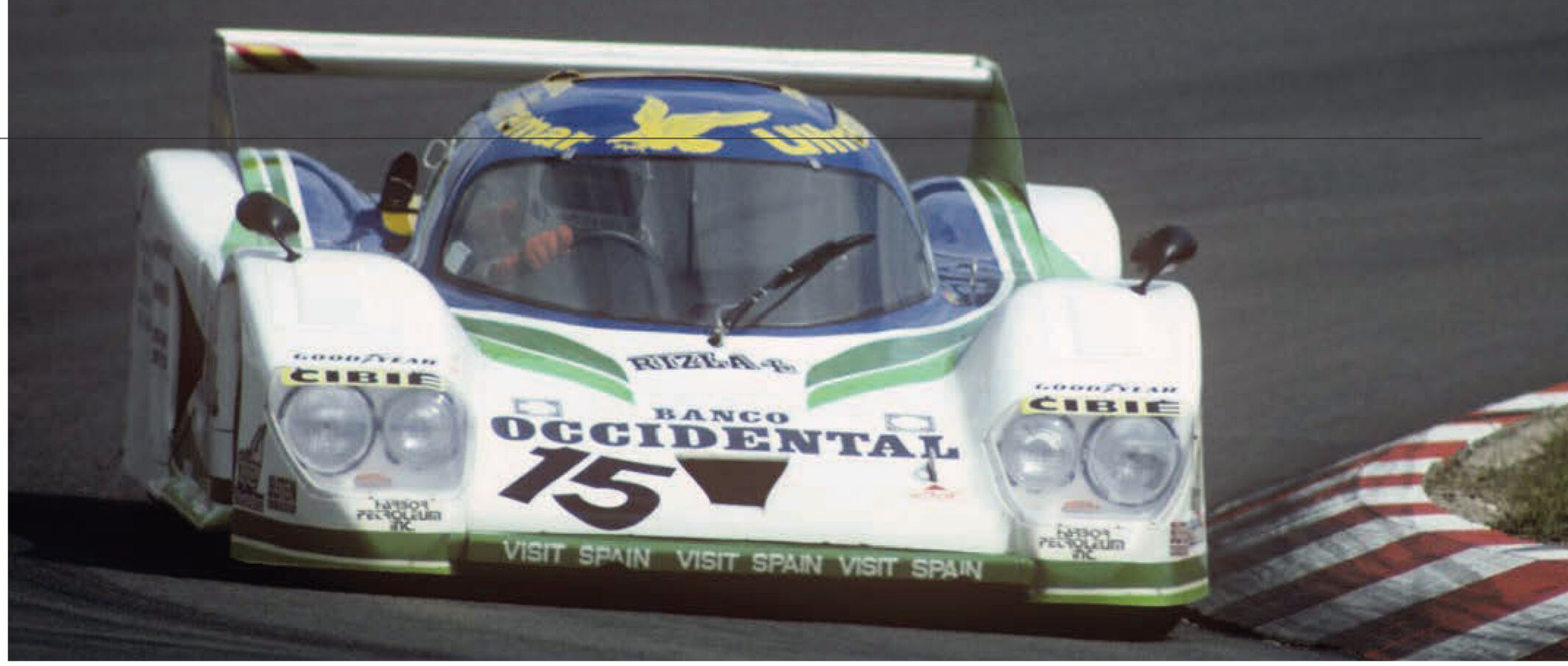
Third place at Watkins Glen one week later, sharing his more familiar Porsche 935 K3 with legends Rick Mears and Johnnie Rutherford, got Garretson's momentum going again, and the three-race run-in to the crown was boiling up nicely, not that the drivers seemed to be too concerned.

The antepenultimate round was a six-hour showdown at Mosport and Garretson was not inclined to take his machine across the border in North America and into Canada. So instead, he arranged to drive with Gianpiero Moretti's team alongside Colombian racer Mauricio De Narvaez. After a row over the car preparation, which ended with Garretson and some co-opted members of his own team working late into the night before the race, the duo claimed seventh. That was crucial as Grohs and Stommelen won, a feat that they repeated at Road America one week later…

All that was left in the long-distance season was Brands Hatch's 1000km. While Grohs had plundered on Garretson's side of the pond in the latter half of the season, the American would be forced to head to Kent – a track he didn't know – and salvage enough points to claim the title. He did, at least, have Rahal back on the strength. Having begun his single-seater career in Europe, Rahal

"Drivers didn't take the title seriously

Harald Grohs narrowly missed the title



Guy Edwards and Emilio de Villota won the final round of the year at the Brands Hatch 1000kms

knew Brands Hatch well. The duo coped admirably with the showers at the start of the race and finished in second position behind the Lola T600-Ford of Guy Edwards and Emilio de Villota. The race as also notable for the Kremer Porsche 917/80, a reworked 917 with modern underpinnings that caused a few red faces with its pace in the hands of Bob Wollek and Pescarlo, and the other-worldly design of the Ford C100, which led the opening stint in the hands of Manfred Winkelhock.

At Brands, though, the Porsche pair of Garretson and Rahal had done enough to clinch the 1981 drivers' title for Garretson – and the result moved Rahal up to third in the final rankings too. Grohs, sharing with Schornstein, had made the job easier for the pair as turbo ailments stuck his 935 in the last hour of the 1000kms.

Fifth place in the points table was shared by the only fully non-Porsche drivers in the 14 of the table. Giorgio Francia and Lella Lombardi had won overall at Mugello in an Osella PA9-BMW, but their story was merely a footnote.

The writing had been on the wall for the Porsche 935 before the end of the season, but the German firm had an ace up its sleeve. Le Mans in June had provided the chance for its to check its development work on the new-for-1982 Group C blend. Its legwork had been successful – it dominated the race (see sidebar) and crossed the line 14 laps clear of anything else.

It was plain that sportscar racing was on the cusp of a new era. Once Group C hit its stride, long-distance racing entered a golden period.

Porsche breaks new ground at Le Mans as Ickx makes history

The Motoring News headline screamed that Jacky Ickx had made history at Le Mans in 1981. The Belgian had indeed set what then seemed like an insurmountable benchmark of five wins at La Sarthe, and surely that would be a record that would stand the length of a long amount of time.

In truth, Ickx, partnered with second-time winner Derek Bell, had never had it so easy at Le Mans and that was, in part, due to Porsche's aborted attempt to break into Indycar racing. When the goalposts moved across the pond, the Weissach firm was left with a 2.65-litre V6 engine that was perfect for the new Group C regs, which were due to come on stream for 1982. Hence the firm not only wheeled out a 936 from its museum (which had originally been created for the 1976 campaign) and bolted on the new powerplant, it also tempted back Ickx, who had hung up his Le Mans helmet. The blend was superb, as was the machine.

After practice at La Sarthe, Bell, a former Renault factory driver at La Sarthe, was bubbling. He told MN editor Mike Cotton: "It really is superb. It has the handling of the Renault but that car didn't have the poke: but it has also got the sudden power of the 935 which, of course, didn't have the handling of this Porsche. It is *all* there with this car. It is fabulous."

There were two factory Porsche 936s: one for Bell/Ickx, and one for Hurley Haywood, Vern Schuppan and Jochen Mass. These two easily outpaced the opposition in qualifying, but the question was whether the new machines would have the reliability to go twice around the clock. Sadly for the opposition, they did…

It is a good job that the fans had the sight of the Kremer-built 917/81 to focus the attention. The recreation of the classic Porsche racer, handled by Bob Wollek, Xavier Lapeyre and Guy Chasseuil, had the underpinnings of a more modern car bolted onto the bodywork of the iconic design. It qualified 18th despite a shunt in practice, but woeful straightline speed meant it was an also ran until a broken crankshaft took away the fans' fun after 82 laps.

That might have been the lighter side of Le Mans, but the dark side is never far from the surface. Jean-Louis Lafosse crashed on the Mulsanne on Saturday afternoon with fatal results, while Theirry Boutsen, at the wheel of a WM-Peugeot, suffered suspension breakage at the Mulsanne kink just 90 minutes into the event. He was lucky to survive, but a marshal was killed and a gendarme was gravely injured as a result.

Through the gloom came the new Porsche. The Mass/Schuppan/Haywood car battled back after clutch problems to retake second place in the early hours, but the gearbox ground to a halt just after the sun came up. When it would set again, Ickx had claimed his record-breaking victory, Bell had scaled the rostrum for the UK. Second and third fell to the home-town hero Rondeau, but the second-placed machine was a whopping 14 laps behind.

Porsche had sewn the seeds for the success the 956 model would enjoy.

Ickx vacates for Briton Bell

Bell adored the 936 machine

The Porsche 917 was a curio

PORSCHE 936/81 – THE ANTIQUE THAT LOOKED TO THE FUTURE

How the Germans looked in the rear-view mirror to take a step forward. By **Matt James**

The dream team: Derek Bell, in the red driving suit, celebrates his victory at the French showdown alongside the 'unretired' Jacky Ickx

The 936 was an older chassis, but under the skin there was some newer technology employed by engineers and a fresh powerplant

After a year away from Le Mans as a factory team, it was a very last-minute call that led the boffins from Weissach back to La Sarthe.

While there was a works entry for the production-based 944 that was sent out to fight for class honours, there was nothing in the top-flight. Until April. Porsche had its eyes firmly on the incoming Group C regulations for 1982 and wanted to steal a march on the opposition.

So, two of the 936 chassis were dusted off from the Porsche Museum and the mechanics set to work. At the heart of the machine, which had won Le Mans overall in 1976 and 1977, was a brand new powerplant, a four-valve-per-cylinder twin turbo, 2.65-litre flat 6 engine capable of putting out north of 620bhp – which was 100bhp more than it had in original trim. The motor had been designed originally to tackle the super-speedways of CART in the US but that project was shelved. The 936/81 was longer than its predecessor by 25 centimetres and the engineers had worked hard on saving weight and updating the chassis to cope with the demands of the extra grunt from the mid-engined format. There was also some studies carried out into the aerodynamics, which led to the car's distinctive airbox.

The 936 had already delivered for Porsche in spades. Gurus at the firm had learned all about turbocharging from running 917 derivatives in Can-Am and puts its brainpower to good work when it dreamt up the 936. It was prepared initially for the 1976 but it was a collection of expertise that Porsche had already gained: it used the tubular spaceframe from the older-spec 909, some running gear from a 917 and the 2.14-litre

The 936 first appeared at La Sarthe in 1976

turbocharged flat six motor. The car ran as Porsche's flagship programme in the Group 6 division through to the end of 1979 , but it was the Group 5 935s that were predominantly ruling the roost in sportscar racing.

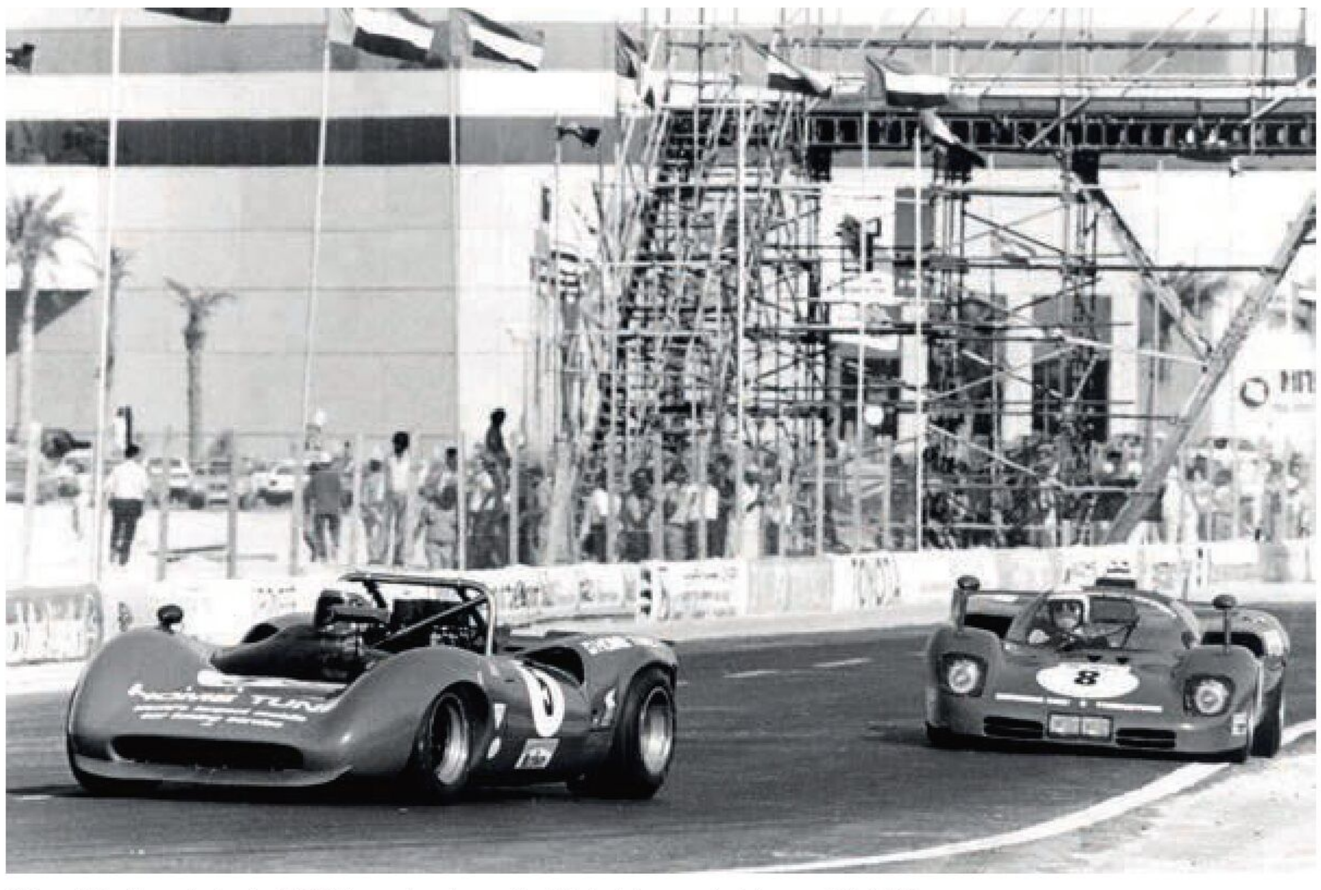
That was until there was the new impetus behind the top-flight. The idea behind Group C is that it would blend the touring prototypes like the Group 5 935s and the two-seat open-topped prototypes like the 936 into a single class and a key element would be fuel consumption to make sure that it wasn't just a powerful turbocharger that would assure victory.

Porsche was ahead of that curve, thanks to the efforts of the 936/81. Le Mans victory was taken at a canter – the machine was an hour ahead of the competition by the end. That landmark event was 50 years since Porsche had been founded, and 30 years since the firm had first tackled the classic Le Mans event. There was no time to celebrate as the 936/81 had to be returned to the museum – complete with its winning grime – and the engineers set about putting the finishing touches to the new Porsche 956. The 936 had proved itself as a highly worthy test bed.

MAKING HISTORY

Motor racing went to Dubai in 1981, the first time the sport had been seen in the UAE. **David Addison** reflects

Robert Horne's McLaren M8D ran in the Marlboro Cup for SuperSports cars



Nigel Hulme's Lola T70 Spyder heads Nick Mason's Ferrari 512S

Nowadays, motor racing has few places yet to conquer, but in 1981 the sport went to Dubai.

Englishman Martin Hone had long held an ambition to run a street race in the UK and had worked with Birmingham City Council to run a race meeting around the second city. He hadn't got there by 1981, but had operated a parade of race cars that had proved very popular and Hone was the person approached to put together a race meeting. With no scene in the UAE, all the cars had to be imported although ex-pat Brit Andrew Hedges, the 1960s sportscar racer based in neighbouring Bahrain, took part in the final race for UAE (and neighbouring places') residents.

Watching Hone's Birmigham parade was Dubai's newly appointed Chief of Police, 28-year-old Dahi Tamim accompanied by his colleague Major Saeed Khalfan who was also Chairman of Al Nasr Motor Sports Club. They were impressed with what they saw and approached Hone to run an event to celebrate the UAE's 10th Anniversary of independence on December 2 1971. Hone flew to Dubai in January 1981 and saw the enormity of the task ahead…

"There was no racing circuit, an insufficient public road network to make a street circuit, no racing cars in the Emirates, few racing drivers, no

Tom Walkinshaw's Mazda heads the Saloon Car pack into turn one, with Vince Woodman behind as others explore the sand on the inside line

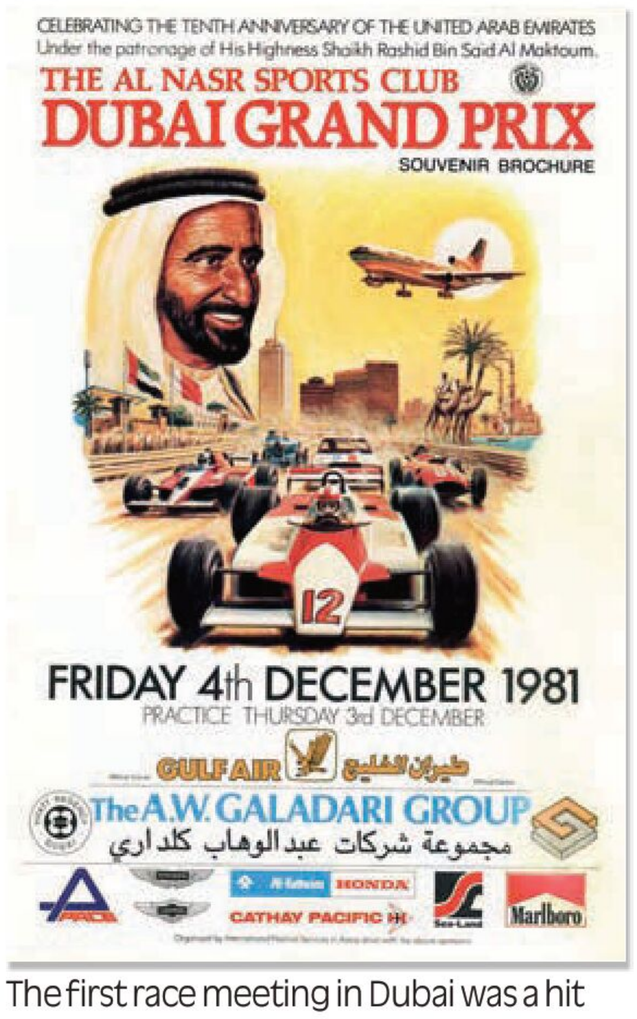
trained marshals and no officials," he said.

A circuit measuring 1.85 miles was designed around the Hyett International Hotel and boasted races for cars from the British Saloon Car Championship, the Supersports series for 1970s sports-racing cars, a race for historic Aston Martins and a celebrity race for Formula 1 drivers in Citroen CXs. These care were due to be raced again at the end of the day by British drivers living in the region …

The Citroens went first after parades and marching bands had entertained the enthusiastic if slightly bemused crowd. John Watson, winner of the British Grand Prix, lined up on pole position for the race with Stirling Moss, Derek Bell, Innes Ireland, Sir Jack Brabham and Carroll Shelby among the opposition.

Wattie led away only to be turned around by Swiss F1 driver Marc Surer on the opening lap, the delay allowing Bruno Giacomelli into the lead, the Alfa Romeo grand prix driver bolting away to win as the likes of Dan Gurney elected to take to the sand in an effort to short cut corners to gain places. Damage was rife and Moss was particularly critical of driving standards. Giacomelli cared not as he had made history by winning the first-ever motor race in Dubai, chased home by Surer and Irishman David Kennedy. One notable non-starter was five-time World champion Juan Manuel Fangio who travelled to the event but didn't feel 100%. He would have a heart murmur over the weekend and wisely avoided racing although did take part in a historic race car demonstration.

Patrick Tambay, who had raced in the Citroen crash-fest and incurred significant damage, made a lap record attempt in his Theodore TY01 that he and Surer had raced in that year's F1 World Championship, as did Watson in his McLaren MP4 later in the day although Tambay's effort was blighted rather by the amount of sand dragged on to the circuit. The Hyatt Regency Trophy was on offer for the faster lap record attempt, but of more interest was the $5000 prize. Tambay did a 68-second lap, straight after the Citroen race with the resultant sandy surface, while Wattie went later in the day and found more grip as he reached 165mph in a straight line and clocked a 64-second lap to trouser the loot.



The first race meeting in Dubai was a hit

Mike Salmon was untouchable in the Pace Petroleum Aston Martin race as he hustled Viscount Downe's Project 212 clear of Roy Salvadori (another to crash out of the celebrity race) in Downe's 1956 DBR1, while a more modern Aston hit the track straight after as the Aston Martin Nimrod made its public debut with Derek Bell at the wheel.

For many, the highlight of the event was the saloon car race, an entry shipped, like the historics, to the newly opened Jebel Ali port that found the event the perfect way of promoting itself. On pole position was the Mazda RX-7 of Tom Walkinshaw with Vince Woodman's Ford Capri alongside. More Capri opposition came from Gordon Spice on row two, with Graham Goode, Spa 24 Hours winner Jean-Michel Martin and former British Bobsleigh team member Charles Sawyer-Hoare for good company. There were plenty of regulars from the British Saloon Car Championship, like John Spiller in his Talbot Sunbeam and John Tait's Toyota Celica, while production saloon converts Alan Minshaw and farmer Derrick Brunt were on the grid

DUBAI GP IN 1981

Patrick Tambay's lap record effort was blunted by the amount of sand on the circuit from the previous race

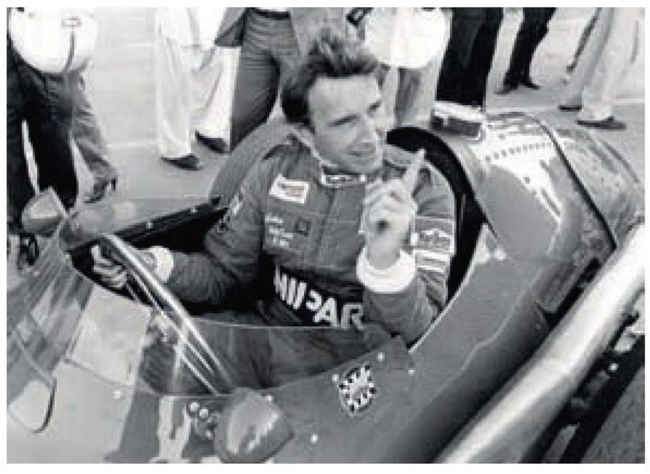
for the Hilton International Hotel Trophies race. Walkinshaw bolted away from pole, chased by Woodman in what was a typical BSCC-style battle: power vs nimbleness. The rotary-engined Mazda was well suited to the dusty Dubai circuit and he edged away from Woodman, the RX-7 carrying the colours of local car dealership AW Galadari Motors that had the franchise for most models in the UAE.

By mid-distance, the Mazda was repeatedly locking brakes and the fishtailing Capri of Woodman was on a charge. Graham Goode's Capri held third while Charles Sawyer-Hoare was a manful fourth, despite damage sustained early on, until the Capri expired in a somewhat smoky fashion, allowing Terry Nightingale's venerable Triumph Dolomite Sprint up to fourth. Walkinshaw responded to the Woodman challenge and broke clear to take the win, the squat Scot heading home Woodman and Goode.

The Marlboro Cup ran for cars from David Piper and Mike Knight's Supersports series and boasted Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason on the grid in his 1969 ex-Mario Andretti Ferrari 512S as used in the making of the Steve McQueen Le Mans movie. Mason was set to take on British racing legend Gerry Marshall in Geoffrey Marsh's Lola T70Mk3B as well as Mike Wheatley's ex-Denny Hulme T70. John Brindley boasted a McLaren M1B and former SAS member Malcolm Clube an M1C to take on Mike Ostroumoff's ex-Graham Hill Ferrari 330P. It was a proper ground-shaking grid with Marshall and Brindley on the front row, Gerry on pole and recently-married Brindley having his first race in the McLaren, the catalyst for a very successful career in historic racing.

It was Brindley who led away, chased by Marshall, the pair of cars sliding around the dusty lap as the cars' power exceeded grip. Behind them ran 1970 Le Mans winner Richard Attwood (Ferrari 275LM) but Brindley looked unstoppable at the head of the field as he continued to hold sway at the front until at half-distance he had a big slide exiting the Gulf Esses and Marshall slashed the gap. Sniffing a win, Gerry picked up his pace, Brindley looking ever more ragged, as the Lola loomed large behind him. A lap later they were almost together, as Brindley had another wide ride through the Esses as he adapted to his new mount. Marshall sat tight before pouncing into the Gulf Esses on the final tour to grab the lead and Marshall headed home Brindley and Attwood for the win. It was pure Marshall: the cars were loud, fast and spectacular and he made a race of it for the large crowd and the television audience which benefited from the entire day being broadcast live.

Spare a thought for Swiss driver Joe Wiedmer who shipped his Porsche 917/10 to the event and discovered it



Listen here! John Watson has a point!

John Watson set the circuit lap record and pocketed $5000

William Monk's DB3S was in the all-Aston Martin race

wouldn't fit on the low-loader at the port. Instead, the only way to get it to the circuit was to suspend it from underneath a helicopter – from which it promptly fell off as the port staff had attached the chopper via the car's rollhoop. It was repaired but given a 30-second penalty for missing the qualifying session so started late and caught fire during the race! History doesn't recount the car's trip home...

The final race, which took place to the surprise of many given the stick the cars had taken earlier in the day, was the ex-pats' race, the Citroens pressed back into action for one last blast. Captain Alan Skennerton took pole, the helicopter pilot in the Dubai Air Force having dabbled in rallycross the previous winter. Alongside was John Micklethwaite, a chartered engineer based in the UAE ahead of 36-year-old American Stephen Carter who was a graduate of the Bob Bondurant school and had been a busy racer back home with pilot David Ovey lining up alongside. Ovey's appetite was whetted by the experience and he would be on the grid at Le Mans within three years. Driving standards were mixed and the track was almost irrelevant on the first few laps as people took to the scenery to gain an advantage but through the mayhem came Skennerton to take the win with Ovey chasing him home.

The event was a success but not repeated. It had been an expensive exercise to ship three grids of cars to the UAE, although it had certainly generated plenty of exposure for Dubai as it started its path to become a tourist centre for worldwide visitors. Nine months of planning and organising by Hone had been realised but the costs and logistics would prove to be the main reasons why the event didn't return. Instead, fast forward to 2004 when the Dubai Autodrome was opened and played host to the FIA GT Championship. On the grid, in a Porsche 911 GT3 RS was Ovey, a far cry from his Citroen outing. It took a while for motor racing to gain a foothold in the UAE, but those pioneers back in 1981 showed what was possible.

And although Formula 1 has been to Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, we are still waiting for that true Dubai Grand Prix... M

Nigel Hulme's Lola T70 Spyder battles the closed version of Gerry Marshall

BIG PICTURE

Taking the sport to a whole new audience

Blasting past the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dubai, the McLaren M1C of Richard Knight chases the SuperSports pack in the Marlboro Cup. Although rallying had been popular in the UAE, motor racing in the desert was something new and three UK-based classes were exported to Dubai as well as plenty of star names such as Juan Manuel Fangio, Stirling Moss and Jack Brabham. The 1960s sports-racing cars were a hit with the fans on a sandy and slippery circuit that used public roads. Motor racing wouldn't return until 2004.

ARI VATANEN AND FORD STEM THE TIDE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR GLOBAL GLORY

The Escort took a final title, but the writing, in Audi's hand, was already on the wall. By **David Evans**

David Richards (left) and Ari Vatanen conquered the world in 1981

Four. If you're looking for one word that changed rallying, it's four. But maybe it's better in its translated form. Flip it to Italian and it makes more sense.

Quattro.

The 1981 season was when everything changed. Audi's four-wheel-drive revolution began with a car homologated on January 1, 1981. In reality, everything had changed six years earlier when Ferdinand Piech became the Audi management board member for technical development. His team laboured behind closed doors and the closed gates of a quarry just outside Nurnberg to research and develop change.

In March 1980, Audi's Quattro was revealed at the Geneva Motorshow. That autumn numbers were slapped on the doors for the first time at the Algarve Rally. Admittedly, the numbers were zeros as Hannu Mikkola ran as course car. But still, on the eve of 1981, the writing was on the wall. Had it been competing, the Quattro would have run a quality field ragged. Twenty-six from 30 stages went Mikkola's way and he would have won by half an hour.

Three months later, the first of those official wins was chalked up. Franz Wittman dominated the Janner Rally just nine days after the Audi was homologated. Fastest one every one of the snowy Austrian stages, nobody could get within 20 minutes of the Quattro.

But still, with the opening round of the 1981 World Rally Championship just a fortnight away, there were those who doubted. Questioned the sense of Audi's shift. Doubted the future.

"How," they reasoned, "could the transmission from a car built by for the German military work in rallying?" And if, by some miracle, it did work, then bolting a turbocharger to the side of five cylinders would only serve to complicate matters further.

No, best stick to what we know was the thinking from many of Audi's rivals.

The new Audi wasn't the sole point of discussion coming to the start of the season opener in the French Alps. The big surprise was the absence of reigning World champion Walter Rohrl. Having won the title with Fiat in 1980, the German had been courted by both Audi

The Audi Quattro's potential was harnessed by the time the World Rally Championship headed to Sweden

and Mercedes ahead of 1981. In the end – and much to the frustration of Ingolstadt – he signed for Merc instead. Rumoured to be developing a four-wheel-drive car of its own, Rohrl signed a big money deal to drive behind the three-pointed star. Just weeks out from the start of the season, Mercedes pulled the plug on the programme.

The World champion was left without a seat for 1981. Rohrl made just one start, retiring a Porsche 911 from Sanremo with a broken gearbox.

Factory cars from Fiat and Opel would provide the main Group 4 threat with Markku Alen spearheading the Italian charge aboard an Abarth 131 while Anders Kullang and Jochi Kleint were provided with a pair of Ascona 400s.

Ford remained absent officially, but David Sutton would return with a Rothmans-backed team led by Ari Vatanen. While the RS1800 had been canned officially at the end of 1979, it was a private effort with older equipment.

It was, however, Group 2 cars from Talbot and Datsun that would fight out the manufacturers' championship with both teams putting in a full commitment to lift the 1981 title.

With the season just half a dozen stages old, Mikkola was a man on a mission to prove Audi's doubters wrong. He won all six of those stages and had built a handsome advantage early on. But he wasn't just posting fastest times, he was demolishing the opposition. On the 27-mile Chartreuse stage, for example, he was two minutes faster than the best of the rest.

In the absence of the previous year's Monte winner Rohrl, Bernard Darniche was looked upon as the benchmark in his Lancia Stratos. The Frenchman had suffered the ignominy of being caught and passed by Mikkola in the event's opening eight-mile dash in the mountains.

It hadn't been an entirely trouble-free WRC debut, however. Already Mikkola's car had shed an alternator belt, forcing him to descend Col de Turini without lights. Worse was to come, but it wasn't the fault of the car.

Mikkola's foot slipped off the brake pedal and the car slammed into a bridge parapet, damaging the front-left corner. The car was fixed, but Mikkola's time at the sharp end was done. After further troubles, he would be forced to use the side of a mountain to slow the Quattro down after the car's brakes failed on the final loop of stages.

And what of his team-mate, Michele Mouton? With Audi having failed to sign Rohrl, the French lady was drafted into the team late on. Undoubtedly, she was there on talent, but Audi was also well aware of the publicity potential for having a lady driver at the wheel of its all-new car. Unfortunately on a rally which passed close by her Grasse home, Mouton failed to make the start proper, her Quattro hit trouble on the concentration run from Paris.

Much as the doubters would have

Markku Alen won on Rally Porugal

"Audi was the game-changer in rallying in 1981

Bernard Darniche upheld the honours for Lancia with its glorious Ferrari-powered Stratos, but the Frenchman was soon left trailing

wanted to point the finger, the issue for the second Audi was traced to dirty fuel.

For all that speed and potential, it was Jean Ragnotti who won the opener, almost three minutes clear of Guy Frequelin's Talbot Sunbeam Lotus.

If ever there was an event destined to showcase the power of four, it was the Swedish snow. Mikkola finished the job he'd started on round one. Fastest on 15 of 25 stages he romped clear of Vatanen's Escort to win by close to two minutes. Of similar note was the misery felt by the local fans in Karlstad. For the first time since its inception in 1950, the Swedish Rally was won by a non-Swede.

Even worse, there wasn't even a local on the podium as Vatanen's David Sutton team-mate Pentti Airikkala took third ahead of Kullang's fourth-placed Ascona.

More pertinently, for the first time ever, a four-wheel-drive car had won a round of the World Rally Championship.

It would be six months and seven rallies before Mikkola and Audi scored points again. The Quattro skipped a Safari won by Shekhar Mehta for the third time and had its asphalt pace badly exposed in Corsica. There were no fastest times for either factory Quattro and both retired with engine problems (piston failure

Jean Ragnotti won the season's opener for Renault in the snow on Monte Carlo

Alen finished on the podium three times in the 131 in his quest for the World drivers' title

for Mikkola, camshaft for Mouton).

Darniche had the last laugh steering his Stratos past the ailing Audis to victory. Another second place for Frequelin moved the Talbot driver to a clear lead at the top of the table. Heading to the Acropolis and round five, he was 12 points ahead of Alen.

Audi hit the ground running in Greece and Mikkola and Mouton were comfortably ahead early on. Concerned by overheating issues suffered on the previous round, the Quattros arrived at the Acropolis with the inner headlights removed and replaced by flaps that would allow more airflow into the engine bay. The scrutineers were interested in those modifications and excluded all three works cars (Janner winner Wittmann was a factory entry in Athens).

Having retired from two of the first three rounds, Vatanen put his first win down on the Acropolis, easing his way into the title fight.

But now it was decision time for all of the teams. With Greece done, the next two rounds of the championship meant a significant commitment in terms of cash and logistics to take the cars to south America for back-to-back rounds in Argentina and Brazil. Audi and Fiat stayed home. But Talbot sent a Sunbeam for championship leader Frequelin and Sutton managed to squeeze extra funding from Rothmans to head across the Atlantic. Vatanen led Rally Codasur (as Rally Argentina was known then) initially before a crankshaft pulley came adrift. The car was fixed and, running down the field, the Finn set about recovering time, only to crash heavily while struggling to see through the dust of a slower car ahead. Frequelin scored an important win to further his advantage at the top of the table. Datsun driver Shekhar Mehta's second place in Buenos Aires was enough to elevate the Kenyan to second in the championship.

Guy Frequelin jumped into a Peugeot 504 on the Ivory Coast to maintain points chase

Vatanen needed a result in Brazil and he got one with a win. Second for Frequelin contained the Finn's gain on the series leader, but Ari had a real opportunity at the following round. He was going home, it was the Rally of 1000 Lakes and Frequlein had opted out.

Having skipped South America, Audi had spent time in the Sahara, testing a new cooling plan for the front of the car. With the vents in place of the headlights homologated, the Quattro posed a serious threat on the fastest rally of the season.

Mikkola was quickest out of the blocks and made the most of the car's traction in the wet weather. The event would, however, run under a cloud after Wittmann's car collided with officials in a freak accident – the flying finish boards, unsighted due to heavy rain and spectators, meant the Austrian's Audi arrived at the stop line at competitive speed.

President of the Finnish Automobile Federation Raul Falin died in hospital having sustained serious injuries.

Mikkola's hopes of a second win of the season were foiled when his car dropped onto four cylinders, with a broken cam-follower diagnosed. Changing the part cost him 4m20s in penalties and dropped him to fifth. He would charge back to third, but up front it was now a straight race between Vatanen and Alen. The Rothmans driver – now using the same Pirelli rubber (instead of Dunlop) that was fitted to the 131 – was conflicted. He wanted to win, but his co-driver David Richards was quick to point out that second place and a big haul of points would help their title challenge no end, especially with Frequelin absent.

Vatanen pleaded to keep the pressure on Alen. The Fiat had already been off the road and rolled – the Laitikkala inversion costing just 15 seconds – with both drivers pushing to the maximum.

It was another co-driver who helped focus Vatanen. After seeing some wayward tracks in one second-day stage, Alen's navigator Ilkka Kivimaki remonstrated with Ari, telling him: "Now listen here Vatanen, those are not the tracks of this year's World champion..."

Vatanen got his head down and brought the car home a minute up on his rival.

That win brought Vatanen to within six points of the championship lead. The gap would narrow further in Italy. Frequelin's Subeam succumbed to a broken engine and Vatanen fell foul of what some saw as an impetuous desire to chase wins everywhere.

Despite a renewed plea from

"Vatanen went after the win - and then crashed"

Podium finish for Blomqvist

Alen's mission ended abruptly

Hannu Mikkola took the spoils in Britain, but Vatanen won title

Mikkola puts the title chasers in their place in Britain as Frequelin's attack falters

Guy Frequelin might have had the points advantage arriving into Chester, but a lack of RAC experience put him very much on the back foot. Britain's round of the World championship was still a secret rally run from the maps in those days. The wasn't the ideal time for an RAC debut, but there was a title to be won.

Any hopes the championship challengers had of going out in a blaze of podium-toping glory were blitzed by an inspired drive from Hannu Mikkola in the Audi.

Tony Pond clung bravely and stoically to the Quattro's coat tails through horribly wet early conditions. The first night claimed a whole host of top names with Malcolms Wilson and Patrick (Escort and Ascona respectively) going off. They would be joined by the Markku Alen (Stratos), the Finn losing out in the battle to keep the Lancia on the straight and narrow with a puncture.

Further into the woods, four-wheel drive really counted and Hannu moved clear. Pond's Vauxhall Chevette HSR was back to the top of the timesheets when Mikkola inverted the Audi in Grizedale, but by the time the rally moved into Kielder he was back to the front and pulling minutes out of the opposition.

Pond's superb run ended with gearbox failure in Yorkshire, but it was Wales that provided a real sting in the tail as heavy snow arrived in time to greet the crews. None of that was enough to deter Mikkola, who emerged from the principality with an 11-minute advantage and a third RAC win in four years.

Behind him Vatanen had moved into second following Pond's demise and was making the most of some specially cooked Pirellis which enhanced the traction from the Escort. The Finn was unusually subdued in Britain, knowing his title hopes lay very much in his rivals' hands. Despite a lack of experience, Frequelin was running well in the top five before he went off the road in Dyfi.

From then on, Vatanen was happy to wind things back and bring the car to the finish as a World champion. Some consolation for Talbot came with Stig Blomqvist's third place – the Swede's presence on the bottom step of the podium enough to seal the manufacturers' crown for the Coventry-based team.

Competing for the first time since Sanremo, Michele Mouton gave a fine account of herself in the second Audi. Having driven through much of Wales in rear-wheel drive only, she dropped the Quattro off the road in the woods near Beddgelert.

It was a frustrating end to the year for the French lady, but both her and Mikkola had already been retained by Audi for the following season. And 1982 would mean even more success for both Mouton and the game-changing Quattro.

Richards that they throttle back and take the points, Vatanen gave chase to Mouton's 38-second lead on the final night in Sanremo. They crashed, but salvaged enough points to reduce the deficit to just two points.

Mouton made yet more WRC history in 1981, scoring the series' first outright win for a lady driver in Sanremo.

The penultimate round of the series took the crews to western Africa for the Ivory Coast. Again, there was the question of who would travel to a non-European round. Again, Rothmans dug deep and found a way to send a reluctant David Sutton team south. Sutton was never a fan of rough rallying in that part of the world and was even less of a fan by the time he was heading home.

With the drivers' championship on the line, Frequelin talked the PSA Group into loaning him a Peugeot 504 after it became clear the usual Sunbeam wouldn't be available. The V6-engined Peugeot was no stranger to success in Africa and delivered a title-boosting fifth for the Frenchman.

Vatanen crashed head first into a lorry almost within sight of the start. And from there, the problems just kept on coming. The decision was taken to change a slipping clutch in the middle of the night – only to find the replacement was the wrong clutch and wouldn't fit. The old one was put back in. Vatanen would have to make do. He eventually finished ninth. He was almost a day (22 hours) behind the winner Timo Salonen.

But he picked up two points to remain in the title fight. Sutton would later – much later – joke that competing on the Ivory Coast in 1981 cost him £100,000.

"That," said Sutton, "is £50,000 per point…"

Frequelin led Vatanen by eight points going into the RAC, which offered a spellbinding end to what had already been a thriller of a history-rewriting season.

Shekhar Mehta was at home on the Safari

AUDI QUATTRO

Nick Garton looks at the world rallying game changer that emerged in 1981

Hannu Mikkola was one of the drivers tasked with taming the new beast from Germany

The Audi Quattro fleet undergoes preparation ahead of that season's Rally Portugal

When the World Rally Championship manufacturers agreed to drop their long-standing ban on four-wheel-drive in 1979, they believed that it was to allow Volkswagen's Iltis jeep to compete for class honours on the Safari and Ivory Coast rallies.

Such rosy bonhomie was dented when the Audi Quattro road car was revealed at Geneva's Motorshow a few months later but nobody panicked. Such a car was too complex to be a threat, they reasoned. Too big. Too heavy. It didn't even have a handbrake…

While Audi's rivals may have been guilty of complacency, the Ingolstadt team was equally prone to another deadly sin: pride.

Audi's engineers were so convinced that Vorsprung durch Technik would prevail that they eschewed tried-and-tested WRC components. The rally cars were outfitted by suppliers to Audi's showroom product like Kleber (tyres), Fuchs and Ronal (wheels) and Boge (suspension), which dulled the Quattro's competitive edge.

True, working with these firms helped to massage what was a relatively small budget (Audi was still the commercial runt of the Volkswagen family litter in 1981, after all). Yet when the Quattro later acquired a measure of dominance, it did so by working with the most experienced suppliers in the WRC.

Creating an implacable enmity in the heart of Walter Rohrl was arguably Audi's biggest error. His decision to

Flying over the yumps on Rally Finland, the Audi Sport machine of Hannu Mikkola would eventually be beaten into a third-place finish

back Mercedes and Stuttgart over Ingolstadt prompted such vitriol from Audi in the German media that Rohrl made the Quattro's humiliation his sworn priority; swiping the 1982 drivers' title and denying the 1983 manufacturers' crown.

Audi Sport's inexperience also played its part: never more so than when its first principal, Walter Treser, earned his team a disqualification (and his own removal from office), for replacing the Quattro's inner pair of quad lamps with an unhomologated flap to cool its super-heated engine bay on the 1981 Acropolis.

Mercedes' withdrawal left Rohrl on the sidelines in 1981 while Mikkola's crowning as the first non-Swede to win the Swedish Rally and his dominant RAC victory brought joy to the Audi team. In between these two wins, however, lay a fraught season in which the incoming team boss, Roland Gumpert, had to wrestle with curing the early Quattro's inherent turbo-lag, chronic understeer and its propensity to burst into flames.

Despite these problems, Peugeot's incoming boss Jean Todt grasped the enormity of what was unfolding. Even so, and even with his formidable political skills in play, he would still have to fight some considerable internal battles in order to replace Peugeot's planned two-wheel-drive Group B car with his seminal 205 T16.

Williams designer Patrick Head, working on the early drafts of Austin-Rover's two-wheel-drive Group B Metro in 1981, was another to see which way the wind was blowing. Thus the Metro 6R4 was unleashed.

There was no collective rush among the other manufacturers to build more four-wheel-drive cars based on the Quattro's performance in 1981. Ford persisted with developing its 2WD Escort RS1700T until March 1983, which was almost the same moment that Lancia began to lay plans for its mighty Delta S4. Opel only made a token effort while neither Toyota or Nissan bothered at all.

Despite its flaws, the Audi Quattro remains the star of the 1981 WRC season. No other car has ushered in such profound and lasting change. Few can match its charisma, either.

The very best of what Audi's engineers achieved during 1981 must be found in Michele Mouton's achievement in Sanremo, unrivalled to this day, as the first and only woman to win an FIA-sanctioned world championship event outright. Both she and the Quattro would go on to win more, but few landmarks bear comparison. M

The turbocharged motor suffered big lag

"Others soon saw the Audi writing on the wall"

Mouton made history in the Quattro

WHEN BRITAIN RULED THE RALLYING LANDSCAPE

High foreign interest, works-supported teams and gruelling events made the British rallying scene of 1981 immensely popular. **Luke Barry** recalls

David Richards, seen studying his roadbooks, was a calming influence on Ari Vatanen

Picking a favourite era of anything is tough because, ultimately, it's a subjective matter that is often heavily influenced by personal nostalgia. One man's John Lennon is another's Kanye West; one size does not fit all. But few will ever deny that there was something rather special about British rallying in the early 1980s.

Rallying as a discipline was on a rapid rise come 1981. The World Rally Championship for drivers had been created two years earlier, with Bjorn Waldegard and then Walter Rohrl collecting the first two titles. Ari Vatanen would do the business in '81 with Britain's David Richards guiding him all the way, becoming the UK's first-ever World Rally champion.

And back home, things were similarly exciting. The British series was seen as the place to go to hone a driver's skills. A quick glance at the period's roll of honour, Hannu Mikkola, Pentti Airikkala and Vatanen, proved the point. Three Finns had won the British domestic title in the three preceding years to 1981.

"I think as far as the British

Tony Pond worked his magic in the trusty Vauxhall Chevette HSR and was particularly spectacular on Tarmac events

championship was concerned, it was the best time ever," says McRae today. "It was the championship then, and the people you competed against were World championship drivers. And the events; the Circuit of Ireland was 5-600 stage miles over four days. The Scottish Rally started in Glasgow and went round the south and then all the way up to Inverness, Aberdeen. It did the whole of Scotland."

Richards agrees: "The British Rally Championship was the place everyone came to earn their stripes. All the Scandinavians came across to Britain to show their pace and be seen by the factory teams, and we had a hot array of British drivers. So the British championship was as hotly contested as the World championship events."

It all began with the Mintex International Rally that toured the north of England from Newcastle to York. The Circuit of Ireland formed round two before the Welsh and Scottish rallies and then a trip to the Isle of Man to conclude the year. At typically around 2-300 competitive stage miles they were far meatier and sterner tests than you'd get today. That did prompt a different approach to what's required today.

"You settled yourself in and you worked out where you were and where you had to put good times in and get the performance," says Richards. "They were longer events. It's like comparing a sprinter with a marathon runner. They have different skillsets and different ways you would approach it. I don't necessarily think a sprinter would win a marathon race and I'm sure a marathon runner wouldn't win a sprint race. There were sections where you'd obviously be flat out and sprint but in the main it was a lot more tactical, endurance-style events."

That doesn't mean to say drivers were simply pootling around though, as Malcolm Wilson argues: "I think in all honesty even though the events were as long as they were, even then they were still sort of classed as sprint events, certainly all the ones in Britain. For the Circuit of Ireland you probably needed to adopt a slightly different approach because of the length of that but all the other events, all the gravel rallies, I must admit you tended to treat them as out-and-out sprint events."

Wilson was one of two drivers competing in a Ford Escort Mk2 for the Rothmans-backed David Sutton Cars team with Airikkala as his team-mate; Vatanen drove another in the WRC. Jimmy McRae represented Opel in the newly developed Ascona, Russell Brookes piloted a Talbot Sunbeam Lotus and Tony Pond drove the trusty Vauxhall Chevette. It turned out to be the beginning of an end of an era as the rear-wheel-drive cars were soon usurped by Audi's Quattro that took the rallying world by storm. But in 1981, the plethora of lightweight, tail-happy, rear-wheel-drive machines were top dog.

The Escort had won nine of the last 10 British titles before '81, but it was being reined in as Mike Broad, co-driver to Brookes, explains: "The development of the Talbot and the

"The British series was the place to go to"

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Vatanen interrupted his WRC assault to win the Welsh Rally

Champion Jimmy McRae was pleasantly surprised by the pace of the Opel Ascona 400

Chevette was continuing where the Escort had stopped. We moved onto the Chevette the following year and the car definitely still had a lot of development going on which had been throughout 1981 so it was really Chevettes, and I suppose you've got to say Jim and the Ascona was arriving as well."

Wilson adds: "I think there's no question the Chevettes and the Opels definitely had upped their game, and I think there were certain events where the Escort was strong but there were obviously events as well where the Chevette was better. And they did have a bit more power but the Escort was still just such a fantastic handling car, very nimble."

Pond and the Chevette were the recognised package to beat on asphalt, but McRae had a thing or two to say about that. The long-time Vauxhall driver had been shuffled out of the equation and found refuge with Opel for 1981, something that didn't look like a strong move on paper.

"Tony Pond said it was the bus and truck division of the group," McRae laughs. "The Opel Ascona 400 was more like a taxi compared with the Chevette. But I did a test with that in Ireland before I drove it and thought, 'this car's a lot better than a lot of people think'".

His point would be proved on the Circuit as McRae won and Pond retired with a broken propshaft: "I had actually gone to Germany to set the car up on Tarmac and they wanted me over to drive it to see what I thought, and I thought this would never work on the Circuit of Ireland," says McRae. "So I changed it all about and there were certain people in Opel over there who said I was mad but I went on and won the Circuit of Ireland. And I remember Tony Fall, who was in charge, said, 'Well you've shown some of these German guys that they don't know everything!'"

That victory moved McRae to the top of the standings following a second place to Airikkala on the Mintex. Vatanen made a one-off return to Britain on the Welsh and scooped maximum points with Pond in second and McRae third. Pond would rise to the front on the Scottish, winning it and the Manx, but second spot for

Walter Rohrl tackled the Manx Rally aboard a Porsche 911 SC but retired with a broken driveshaft

McRae on both events assured him his first of five British titles.

And that made him far more of a superstar than he would be if he won the 2021 British Rally Championship. Rallying was new, it was exciting, and it didn't come with some of the stigmas it now does. A slot on ITV's World of Sport on a Saturday afternoon, followed by coverage on BBC Grandstand, was a major boost too.

Wilson says: "There was no question you were much more in the public face back in 1981 because obviously all the events were on Grandstand or ITV, so you were much more of a public figure then that what the British championship is now. If you think, at that point of time there must have been probably six or 10 of us all professional drivers, paid to do the British Rally Championship. As you're aware now there's nobody in that position."

Broad adds: "You were on Grandstand on Saturday afternoon which was the biggest sports programme that you could get. You only had three television stations in those days too, so it was massive, yes. It sounds very big headed, but we were sports stars in the Midlands here, we got featured on local television whenever we went to do things, we got interviewed every time we came back. It was covered by every regional television station let alone the BBC on Grandstand."

Another key difference between 1981 and 2021 was the role of the navigator, and specifically how they described the stage for their driver. Forty years ago, only the Manx of the British championship rounds permitted the use of pacenotes; firmly placing the onus on map reading skills and local knowledge from the co-drivers.

Attitudes were far more relaxed too. There was a certain sense of 'getting away with it', which just wouldn't be entertained today. Broad recalls: "I remember on a Manx changing the gearbox in between stages which was absolutely forbidden. But the chase car happened to be in a farmyard, and it did take eight minutes and we didn't lose any time. I remember we had to ask Phil Short to move to get to the front of the queue of the next stage and to this day he doesn't understand where we'd been. I just said we'd been for a pee. Things like that did happen. There were a lot of shenanigans going on, it was good fun."

Plenty of fun was had after the rallies too. Whereas nowadays service teams cannot get their equipment packed away quick enough, there was a strong degree of socialising in the '80s as 1982 Irish Tarmac champion John Coyne remembers.

"Probably the biggest difference between then and today was when you got to the end of a rally on a Sunday afternoon or evening everybody didn't just pack up their stuff and disappear," he says. "There was typically an awards ceremony, a dinner, quite a bit of drinking and telling of stories before we all headed off late into the night or early the next morning. That's something you miss. The bulk of people these days pack up after the final service and head home."

As strong as the stage rallying scene was, there was far more to British rallying culture in 1981 than just the special stages. The Motoring News Road Rally series was also in its pomp at this time. Come the 1980s, the competition might not have been as

The Ford Escort RS1800 was still competitive but the opposition was tough. Vatanen and Airikkala took a win apiece in their Escorts

dense as it had been a decade earlier but the quality at the front was as fierce as ever. John Millington knows, as he won the title 40 years ago.

"Obviously there was a tremendous amount of interest, spectator following and things like this. But there was also a massive influx of factory cars, ex-works Chevettes, TR7s, things like this that had filtered down to road rallying and made it very, very fast and very, very competitive in effect," he says.

"We had a Sunbeam, Talbot and were the first ones to actually rally at Motoring News level. In 1980 we struggled with it to try and develop it, get it going, get it reliable because it's alright having a stage car that'll do 50 miles and you have a major service, but a road rally car has to do 200 miles and nobody touches it so it's a different sort of animal. We ended up with a massive engine failure on the last rally in 1980 which cost us the championship."

A new engine for the following year rectified the problem though and Millington duly won the series. He calls this his "pinnacle" as it was "as far as we could get". He explains: "The major interest at clubman's level, which is what we were, was road rallying. [On] stage events you had to have a lot of money and a lot of car and a certain amount of factory support to be successful. We didn't have either the money or the sponsorship, so road rallying was our pinnacle."

Keys to success were a good crew, a good car and good endurance skills. With such close competition, every single element mattered. "Sometimes there was just a handful of seconds after 200 miles between several crews which showed how close it was," says Millington. "Considering it only took just an overshoot on a junction and that handful of seconds were gone, you couldn't make a mistake. I did a wrong slot on an event down in Wales and I lost a minute because you were timed to the minute, so we dropped over the 59 seconds which cost us a minute and not a handful of seconds, that's how competitive it was."

"Back then it was a different mentality"

And just like on the special stages, there was "a different mentality" at this time. "Basically we were road racing, we weren't rallying" Millington adds. "It was flat out all night, hundreds and hundreds of spectators. For sure you couldn't do it now, you'd be classed as totally anti-social. It was a very, very popular sport, you can't overemphasise how popular it was and that's apparent now more than it was in the day with the amount of interest. You've only got to look at some of the Facebook groups and see how much interest there is in the old photos from what was going on in those days."

Which brings us full-circle and back to the top of this recollection of British rallying in 1981. Rallying was a real adventure 40 years ago, and its competitors were absolute heroes. For better of for worse things have changed nowadays, but the antics of 1981 will never, ever be forgotten.

BIG PICTURE

The start of a new era for British Formula 3

There were 20 rounds of the British Formula 3 Championship in 1981 and the landscape was about to change. Jonathan Palmer stepped up from Formula Ford 1600 with the West Surrey Engineering team, and the crew co-opted Kiwi Dick Bennetts onto the engineering strength. West Surrey, which went on to become West Surrey Racing, would become the category's benchmark team. Here, Palmer – a seven-time race winner in 1981 – shares the front row with Mike White's March 813 at Silverstone in the third round of the season in late March.

JUNIOR SINGLE-SEATERS: READYING FOR TAKE-OFF

Geoff Lees' finest triumph didn't deliver the awards hoped for, but 1981 for West Surrey Racing was just the beginning, as **Graham Keilloh** explains

Plus ca change... Geoff Lees found his European F2 title didn't get him F1 opportunities without cash, but the Midlander has no regrets

On the face of it, it wasn't an obvious career move. Geoff Lees had sampled Formula 1, albeit in a patchy succession of short-term, and often non-qualifying, drives. He'd also raced competitively in Can-Am. But for 1981, the year in which he turned 30 years old, Lees stepped into the European Formula 2 championship to race a works Ralt-Honda.

"I didn't have enough sponsorship and I couldn't get money to do Formula 1," Lees says. "Back in those days, as I suppose it is now, for the up-and-coming drivers it's difficult to get in unless you've got money.

"I didn't enjoy Can-Am racing, it wasn't what I was used to. I did well there: it was always between me, Jacky Ickx and Keke Rosberg [at] the front. [But] they are big heavy brutal cars and I'm a single-seater man."

"I'd already at this time won the Macau Grand Prix, and [team boss] Sid Taylor was quite a fan of mine. Sid rang [Ralt boss] Ron Tauranac and got me the drive. I jumped at the chance."

The Ralt-Honda combination was expected to be strong, though this wasn't Lees' primary motivation.

"I knew at that time after one year or two years that Honda was coming back into Formula 1," he continues. "I hoped if I won the Formula 2 championship it would help me get a drive in Formula 1 through Honda. But the problem was I won the Formula 2 championship one year too early! Because they carried on with Formula 2 the year after and then came into Formula 1 the year after that, so I already had a year away."

Furthermore, initially in '81 the Ralt-Honda was a difficult proposition. "It wasn't the best of cars," Lees reports. "We were carrying sidepods that I learnt later in the year never worked because they weren't sealed to the underbody of the car, so the car was really lacking downforce."

Then there was the Honda engine. "It had apparently more power than anything else but the problem was it had no torque! Honda were used to building motorbike engines and all they need for a motorbike is high power but they had no torque at all. When you loaded the car in the corners it would slow down instead of accelerating!"

Also Goodyear's withdrawal between seasons meant the Ralt, to start with, ran on Pirelli rubber. "I made a joke at Silverstone and I said to my team that I could feel the Pirelli tyres going off in the pitlane, they were so bad!," Lees adds. "I think they [Pirelli] fell out with me and never spoke to me after that, so luckily we joined Bridgestone.

"They [the Bridgestones] were better, grippier and better handling, but when I went to Enna one exploded, and they already had turned the car upside down on us in Japan, so I was a little bit wary of them. But they did get better as the year went on."

And Lees' major breakthrough awaited at the season's two-thirds' mark. "John Judd got hold of the engine then it turned into a really good engine," Lees says. "I went out to practice at Spa and he said to me 'you're going to go out with a different engine in the afternoon, you've got nowhere near as much power but you might find it easier to drive'. Straight away I was a second-and-a-half quicker than everybody else. I just couldn't believe it, he made such a difference. And that's why after then I started winning races."

Lees indeed beat Thierry Boutsen to the F2 crown with a fine late-year charge: three wins and three seconds in the final seven rounds, and only missing out in the other round, at Enna, with his tyre failure.

Lees' first win of the year was at Pau, and he described it as his hardest race. "It was 43 degrees, even people were passing out in the crowd apparently," he recalls. "And I remember getting to the last lap and my team – when you start the race [at Pau] you turn at the first corner and then you go past the

pits – for some silly reason they knocked off one lap.

"So we got to the last-but-one lap and I thought I'd won, so crossing the line I took my foot off and the next minute Thierry Boutsen's coming roaring up behind me and I saw the guy on the gantry he put his finger up, one more lap! It was panic stations getting it going again!"

Yet with 1981's F2 title won, as intimated it was quickly apparent for Lees that his triumph wasn't opening the expected doors. "I was champion that year and I couldn't carry on in those days, the FIA kicked you out of Formula 2," he notes. "And I'd love to have done it again until finally I got a Formula 1 drive.

"I had to go [in '82] to race the Aston Martin Nimrod [in sportscars] and pick up races I could in different places because I couldn't get a Formula 1 drive. Lots of people such as Ken Tyrrell and Colin Chapman had said 'we'd love to have you but how much money have you got?'

"I remember thinking after Misano [where Lees clinched the F2 title] finally I made it, now I can go to the Formula 1 teams to prove to them I'm good enough. I thought I'd got the documents signed and sealed.

"I look back on [the '81 season] now to say it was one of my best years of racing because people don't know what you've actually got; people think 'Oh well, he's got a Honda engine, it must be powerful'. But truthfully the car didn't work well. If you'd have put the same engine in the [mid-seventies Ralt] RT1 I think I could have still won the championship because we didn't have more downforce than the old RT1 had.

"As I say, I look back at being disappointed but I now look back at my career and think 'well you did the best with what you'd got' and I wouldn't change a thing! I went to Japan and really enjoyed Japan. I drove everything: touring cars, sportscars, grand champion cars, I did Honda's Formula 1 engine testing and I was so busy. So I had a fantastic career; I loved every minute of it."

Bobby Unser was 1981's Indianapolis 500 winner, but we didn't know this until October

British Formula 3 in 1981 meanwhile featured a watershed, as one of the UK's most successful teams was born. It immediately displayed the sort of on-track polish with which it became synonymous, and did so with a hardly orthodox beginning.

So that Formula Ford racer Jonathan Palmer could move to F3, his backer Mike Cox purchased the Ralt RT3 that had won the final four British F3 races of 1980, and the title, in Stefan Johansson's hands with Project Four. And Cox and Palmer also wanted Project Four's Dick Bennetts to run their effort. Trouble was, Bennetts had gone back home to New Zealand.

It required two months of persuasion to get him to return, as well as what Palmer admitted was being somewhat over-optimistic about what they could actually offer him. As it was, a five-man operation (a total that included Palmer himself, as well as Palmer's brother Jamie as weekend gofer) was gathered in the month before the season opener. It operated out of the side of Cox's engineering shop, armed with a decrepit Ford A-series truck...

Called at this point West Surrey Engineering, with Palmer it won the first four races of '81 and eventually the title with a consistent

Indy's 'Andretti curse' continued in 1981

A devastating late-year run got Lees the F2 crown. Here he leads away at Donington

West Surrey Racing was born in 1981

Palmer claimed an imperious F3 title

Lees' 1981 F2 breakthrough came at Spa, when John Judd sorted his Honda engine

year in an ultra-reliable car.

"When Jonathan Palmer won the opening round there were many prepared to write off his achievement as a mere flash in the pan," MN's David Tremayne wrote at the year's end. "Some still clung to that belief a little over a month later, by which time the Sussex doctor had notched up another three victories in clean, dominant style. Far below stood those ready to see him plunge. He didn't."

West Surrey Racing, as it became, was on its way, as was Palmer who got Formula 1 testing opportunities on the back of his championship. "With speed and cunning, allied to the ability to sort a car, Palmer represents a major British hope for future GP honours," Tremayne added.

Mauro Baldi meanwhile dominated the European F3 championship with eight victories in his Euroracing March 813 Alfa. He beat of a trio of Martini MK34s driven by Frenchmen Alain Ferte, Philippe Alliot and Philippe Streiff.

The US scene: Penske triumphs

The 1981 Indianapolis 500 was one of the most notorious in the event's history. Penske's Bobby Unser took the chequered flag first, but come Monday morning the win was switched to second-to-the-flag Mario Andretti.

It was to do with Unser's 'blending in' to the snake of cars behind the pace car when emerging from the pits, as herein he motored past a few more cars than you'd expect before 'blending'. It got him penalised a lap. "If there is any surprise in all this it is that the officials did not assess the penalty earlier than Monday morning," opined MN's report.

But come *October,* following appeals, victory switched back to Unser. He was still guilty, but his punishment was now only a fine. This caused consternation not least from Andretti. "It clearly shows that as long as you cross the finish line first it doesn't matter how you get there," he seethed.

The famous race's 65th running was indeed ill-starred. It contained a major crash for Danny Ongais making his long-awaited debut in his Interscope 002, when he arrowed into Turn 3's wall.

> ***"It was one of my best years"***
>
> ***Geoff Lees***

"The car hit with a tremendous force breaking the car up, strewing debris and then flames," MN's report said. "Ongais lay crumpled at the front of the car, his legs fully exposed at the front, and his arms hanging over the side of the cockpit." He sustained a series of injuries, including breaking both legs, and missed the rest of the season.

The race also contained a fearful pit fire involving Rick Mears and his Penske team, wherein Mears plus several of his crew received burns from the invisible methanol flames.

Mears recovered to take his second CART title, winning six races out of the 11 in the Penske PC9B. While of the other two works Penskes, Bill Alsup finished runner-up in the table and 48-year-old Unser – in his final season before semi-retirement – was a frequent frontrunner.

Nevertheless plenty of others could run with and even outpace the Penskes, but bad luck and unreliability precluded a title challenge.

This applied not least to reigning champion Johnny Rutherford and his Chaparral team who experienced a series of crashes, tyre blow-outs and engine failures. Pancho Carter in his private Alex Foods team came closest on points, and he took his first win of an eight-year Indy career in a chaotic Michigan 500.

VAST CHANCE SALOON

Whether it was badged as touring car or saloon car racing, tin-tops kept crowds entertained around the globe in 1981 as different cars and rules added to the variety. **David Addison** looks back

Jeff Allam's Rover 3500 took three wins (left) while Gordon Spice and Vince Woodman (above) were among the fastest Capri drivers

Touring car racing was undergoing another of its periodic transition periods in 1981.

The flagship championship, the European Touring Car Championship, was in its last yearof Group 2 regulations meaning that few manufacturers were keen to build a new car for just one season, but in the UK the formula was booming, albeit to a different and cheaper rule-set.

The European championship had a strange look when the calendar was published for 1981. Gone was the Nurburgring classic on the Nordschleife, while the Spa 24 Hours was missing as well. It still ran, and for touring cars, but curiously was part of the World Championship for Makes putting it in the same group of races as sports cars were tackling.

Those curiosities aside, the series began at Monza with a four-hour race won by the new BMW 635CSi. Although the ETCC was heading for Group A a year later, in which the 635 would star, BMW elected to run the cars in the last year of Group 2 with Ruedi Eggenberger's eponymous team operating the cars. At Monza, Umberto Grano and Helmut Kelleners helmed one car with Johnny Cecotto, the 1975 Motorcycle 350cc World champion having called time on his two-wheeled career and was combining Formula 2 with touring car racing. By 1984 he would be a grand prix driver…

A second 635 was entered for Heribert Werginz and Dieter Quester and that took third in the four-hour race while the Grano/Kelleners/Cecotto car romped home to a win with the BMW 320 of Dieter Kindlmann and Jurgen Pohlmann splitting them. With an entry bolstered by Italian amateur racers in cars of varying degrees of modernity, the championship wasn't looking great. Worse was to come in round two at Vallelunga when six of the top 10 cars were excluded post-race for technical infringements, including the race-winning BMW of Quester/Werginz which was pinged for its springs, and the sister car which was pushed over the line. As more cars fell foul of the zealous scrutineers, Fritz Muller and Heinz Kuhn-Weiss inherited the win in a Mazda RX-7.

Another Mazda appeared next time out at Donington, the car running to BSCC Group 1 regulations and driven by Tom Walkinshaw, the pseudoynmed "Chuck Nicholson" (real name Charles Nickerson) and Peter Lovett. The car dropped out with electrical gremlins but would make its mark later in the season. As for the Donington race, Grano and Kelleners coped with changeable weather to score the win, while third was the Luigi Racing Chevrolet Camaro of former F1 racer Lella Lombardi with Anna Cambiaghi. Grano and Kelleners triumphed again at Zeltweg in round four, then again at Brno and Enna.

"Touring car racing was undergoing a transition"

Spa, still the biggest touring car race of the time even if not a points-scoring round, was expected to be a BMW benefit but the sages hadn't factored in the changeable weather, nor Tom Walkinshaw. He had tackled the event with the Mazda RX-7 in 1980 but the four cars entered retired. He came back a year later with lessons learnt and shared one car with Belgian ace Pierre Dieudonne. Racing a right-hand-drive car for the first time, Dieudonne drove solid stints to keep the car in the mix. They had started second on the grid but the more powerful cars had an edge until the weather changed and Tom and Pierre came back into the mix. Dieudonne suggested settling for second, but that wasn't Walkinshaw's way. Instead, he gave the Belgian another 500rpm and sent the rotary engine car in pursuit of the leading BMW of Eddy Joosen/Jean-Claude Andruet, which suffered an over-revved the engine and broken rocker arm gave the Mazda the lead and Walkinshaw and Dieudonne scored a popular win, the last two-driver entry to win the event.

The European Championship reconvened at Silverstone for the annual Tourist Trophy and Walkinshaw took another win. This time, he shared

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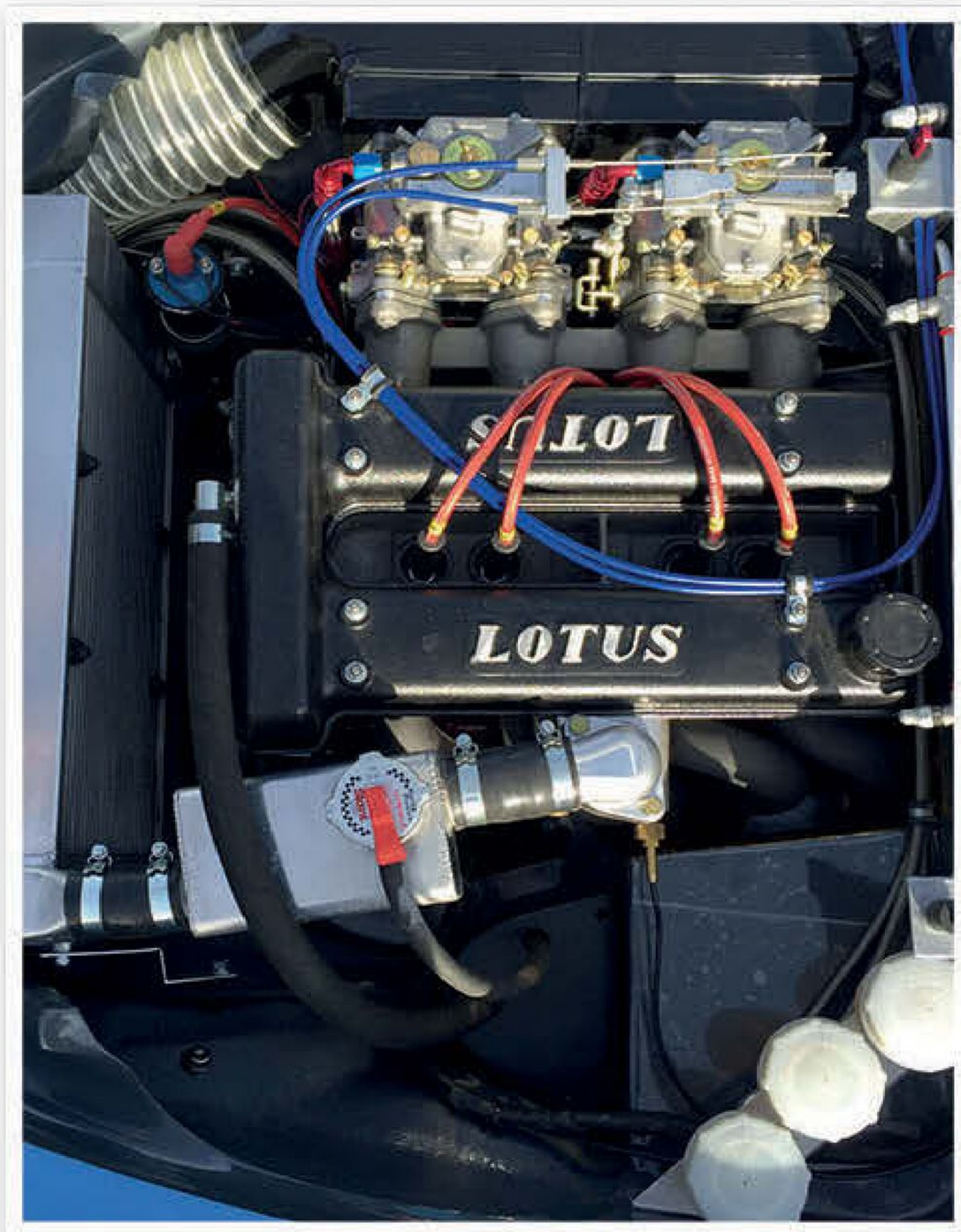

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Despite a slow start, and a brush with officialdom, Peter Lovett won the BSCC race at the British Grand Prix

his RX-7 with Nicholson and, despite fluctuating oil pressure, he was in the right place to capitalise when the Grano/Kelleners hit trouble with a slipping clutch near the end of the race. Second was enough to give Grano and Kelleners the championship, a relief given that the clutch woes would hamper them in the final race at Zolder which was won by the Audi Coupe of Peter Seikel and Fred Rosterg. While the drivers' title fell to the BMW duo, the marque was less lucky in the manufacturers' standings, where it was beaten by the smaller capacity class Skoda, the 130RS having banked points in every race.

Over in Britain, the championship enjoyed a very competitive season and Walkinshaw was a major player, albeit not behind the wheel. Having debuted the Mazda RX-7 in 1979, he bailed a year later and put Win Percy in the car, the man from Tolpuddle easily winning the 1980 championship. Not only was Percy, with his familiar number plate 'Win 1' back for another season, but Walkinshaw's engineering prowess had won him admirers and contracts alike. As the championship was split into four classes based on engine size, plenty of manufacturers wanted a place on the grid. Walkinshaw's TWR (Tom Walkinshaw Racing) operation was the go-to team and in contrast to what you might expect today, he ran three manufacturer programmes in '81! British Leyland entrusted him to run the Rover SD1 programme that Dave Price had begun in 1980, the Mazda link continued and Audi moved away from Richard Lloyd to TWR with its brace of Audi 80s. And, if the spotlight wasn't bright enough on Walkinshaw, one of those Audi drivers was Stirling Moss, the former grand prix legend, Mille Miglia winner and sportscar star being tempted back for a second season. However, an under-powered front-wheel-drive car wasn't really his bag and his season delivered little in terms of results or reputation-enhancement.

Up front, the championship was Ford versus Rover. The Capri 3.0 took on the 3.5-litre Rover with star names in the Dagenham cars: Andy Rouse was one, and it was Rouse who won the opening race at Mallory Park. He had raced for Capri King Gordon Spice the year before but split with Spice and started his own engineering company, Andy Rouse Engineering. With backing from amateur racer Charles Sawyer-Hoare, Rouse built two Capris for him and CS-H and promptly won the series opener while Spice was 11th after a pitstop for a spark plug change. Behind Rouse, though, was Percy, the screaming rotary-engined car ideally suited to the tight Mallory lap, whereas the mighty Rovers weren't: car dealer and experienced racer Peter Lovett took fifth while the second Daily Express-backed example, of Jeff Allam, struggled with rear axle dramas.

Surprisingly, the TWR Rovers struggled at the next race on the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit, a power track in every sense. Instead, Rouse won again from Spice with the best of the Rovers being that of Allam which took fourth. In a giant-killing performance, Martin Brundle didn't just win Class C for the up to 1600cc cars in his Audi 80, but he took an impressive sixth overall.

At Oulton Park, where the short Foster's circuit was in use, Win Percy's Mazda won outright, despite flat-spotting a tyre at the start. Percy held sway ahead of the duelling Ford Capris of Rouse and Spice, whilst West Countryman Vince Woodman took his

"Dooley kept on banking points"

Alfisti Jon Dooley won the baby class

TOURING CARS IN 1981

Equipe Esso Capri to honours next time out at Thruxton. Percy won Class B, again, in his Mazda, but the Walkinshaw magic had yet to work on the mighty Rovers. The pressure was mounting…

The next race at Brands Hatch fell to local ace Nick Whiting, his first at this level. Whiting, who has starred nationwide in Special Saloon Ford Escorts, relieved Percy of the lead mid-race on a wet road in a race that didn't finish until gone 1900hrs! As the darkness descended, the Rovers of Allam and Lovett bagged third and fourth, closer to the pace.

Silverstone next. Lovett won. The pace was a revelation and instantly there was grumbling in the paddock. Lovett drove well, no question, but the Rover's new-found pace made plenty question the car's legality, and perhaps that Allam was considered to be faster than Lovett and didn't win hindered Lovett's case. Allam was out anyway having damaged the sump. Silverstone was the venue for the next race, supporting the British Grand Prix for which Lovett qualified on pole, but an overheated clutch dropped him to eighth on the opening lap. Against expectations, Lovett fought back and scored a second win on the bounce, having taken the lead from the Patrick Motorsport Rover 3500S of Australian Brian Muir. But bounce was the key word: officials gave Lovett a 60-second penalty for crossing the yellow penalty line at Woodcote's chicane, but later rescinded it when evidence proved he hadn't crossed the line but bounced over the kerbs that aligned it.

Percy won outright at Donington from Lovett, Allam off the road with a puncture, but Jeff finally broke his duck with a win at Brands Hatch next time out. A second trip to Thruxton gave

Martin Brundle presses on in a bruising Donington Park round in his Audi 80

Allam a second win and another class win gave Percy a second title. He didn't race in the final round at Silverstone, won again by Allam, Percy having won his class every time out. Indeed, such was the pace of the Mazda that there was little that could touch it in Class B. The Triumph Dolomite Sprints were no longer competitive and there was no obvious challenger to the Wankel-engined racer. That meant that Percy had a problem: the fewer the number of starters in the class, the fewer points he would score. In the end, Mazda ended up fielding more RX-7s to bolster the numbers, some being barely a step up from a road car from the press department…

Walkinshaw's other project, the Audi 80, had a tougher season. At Mallory Park, Brundle and Moss were beaten by the privateer Golf GTi of John Morris, but Brundle's heroics at Silverstone made up for that. Moss took second at Oulton Park to the Toyota Celica of Chris Hodgetts, who went on to win again at Thruxton. The Audis retired at Brands Hatch when Moss had broken throttle linkage and Brundle's gear selector went south and Hodgetts won again at Silverstone's F3 and Grand Prix events. Hodgetts also won at Donington and Brands, where Brundle was excluded for Illegal repositioning of the fuel injection nozzles. Martin won at Thruxton where Hodgetts became embroiled in bruising battles in traffic and Morris won a superb end of season battle with Chris at Silverstone.

And against all of the battles and arguments over legality came another sub-plot and one that had a feel-good factor. The Napolina Alfa Romeo Dealer Team Alfa Romeo Alfasud Ti of Jon Dooley looked the business and its entrant made it sound like a factory-blessed effort but in reality, Dooley, team manager Michael Lindsay and engineer Leo Bertorelli were enthusiastic Alfa-holics. Against them was the British Leyland Austin Metro team, the Datapost-liveried cars helmed by Richard Longman, who tuned their engines, and Alan Curnow.

As British Leyland launched its new hatchback, the Austin Metro 1300 HLS had no real race pedigree, which allowed Dooley to build up an early-season championship lead. Then, he had to hang on to it, as Curnow drew first blood for BL with a win in round two at Silverstone and Longman won at Thruxton. Longman won a further three races, but Jon kept banking points and his way of winning the championship was a virtuoso one: he won the final race in a lights-to-flag drive! Dooley was a remarkable ambassador for Alfa Romeo, the brand and the enthusiastic UK-based Alfa Romeo Owners' Club, and his class crown was well deserved.

There was another feel-good story in Australia. Dick Johnson, a true privateer and a hero among the Ford fans captured hearts a year before with

"Offcials gave Peter Lovett a penalty"

Win Percy won a second BSCC title

Jeff Allam's press-on style catches him out at Silverstone as he bounces over the Woodcote Chicane

a plucky drive to lead the celebrated Bathurst 1000. On lap 17, Johnson rounded The Cutting to discover a rock had been dislodged and bounced on to the circuit which he swerved to avoid and hit a wall. He was out on the spot and was distraught, as he had plunged every last cent of his savings into building the car to try to win the race. Help was at hand from the Aussie fans, though, who on instinct rang broadcaster Channel 7 and pledged money to help him back on track. A total of $72,000 came from the public, which was then matched by Ford Australia President Edsel Ford II who saw the benefit of Johnson to the brand. For 1981, therefore, Tricky Dicky was back on track and headed to Bathurst with a point to prove…

With five wins out of the eight rounds of the Australian Touring Car Championship, the Mount Panorama classic was expected to be Johnson versus old rival and Holden hero Peter Brock who had won The Great Race the year before. Johnson's co-driver John French was leading in the Tru-Blu-backed Ford XD Falcon when a six-car accident at McPhillimey Park blocked the track. The race was red-flagged and not restarted meaning that Johnson and French won from Bob Morris/John Fitzpatrick (Ford Falcon) second and Allan Moffat's Mazda RX-7 third, shared with Derek Bell. Morris had been one of the six involved in the accident but kept second place on the results countback, while Johnson took on God-like status among the Ford fans. Brock was only 21st…

Around the globe, there was enough manufacturer interest, and good racing, to be very positive about touring car racing.

Dick Johnson and John French scooped a Bathurst win after a red flag

Helmut Kelleners shared his ETCC title-winning BMW 635 CSi with Umberto Grano

Gordon Spice had a disappointing season

TWR ran Audis plus Rovers and Mazdas

BIG PICTURE

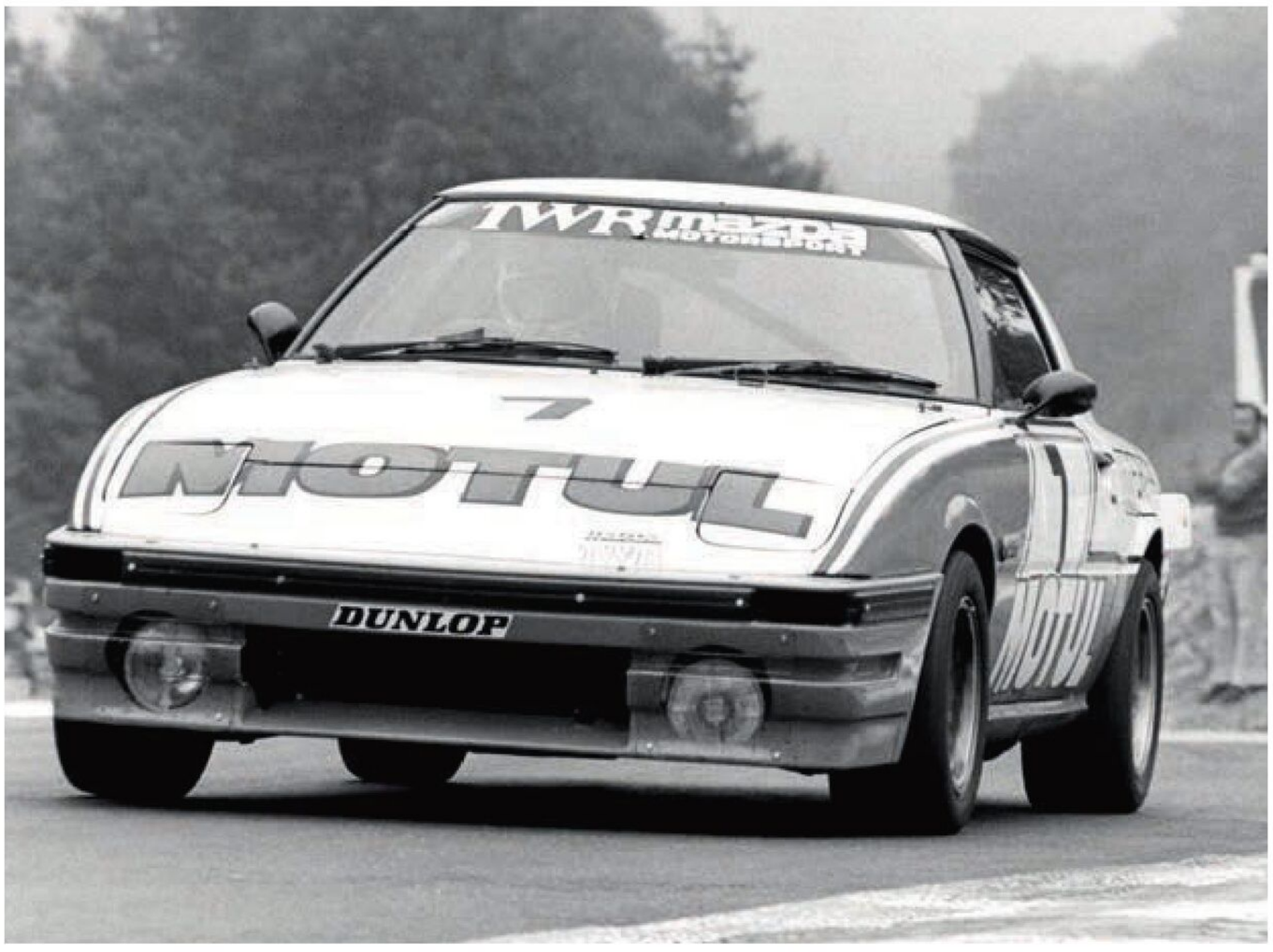
The ultimate Ford for the ultimate German test

German's Deutsche Rennsport Meisterschaft encapsulated all that was bonkers about the nation. Over-the-top styling, over-the-top engines and visceral thrills. Some spectators were even known to put down their steins of beer when these monsters went past. The Group 5-spec machines were enjoying a swan song in 1981 before the rules changes, but we couldn't resist this shot of a 1.7-litre twin-turbo Zakspeed Capri at the Nurburgring, in the very capable hands of eventual champion Klaus Ludwig.

WÜRTH
WURTH
GOODYEAR
2

AMAZING MAZDA

Some argued it wasn't a true saloon car, others adored its engine noise. The Mazda RX-7 did a lot of winning, however. **David Addison** looks back



Tom Walkinshaw was the first to spot the strengths of the rear-wheel-drive Mazda RX-7

Although initially aimed at the sportscar market, the Mazda RX-7 toppled the saloon pack

The Mazda RX-7 was a surprising touring car, more akin to a sportscar in many people's eyes. However, just like the Porsche 911 in the 1960s, the Mazda fitted the bill as a saloon thanks to its overall length and marketed, in some countries, as a 2+2 although the first generation of the car having been a two-seater was a bone of contention.

The car was light and was a hit in the Japanese road car market because its dimensions put it into one of the government's regulations that didn't hit drivers for owning a large car. Thus, the enthusiastic Japanese motorist escaped yearly taxes for driving a large car. With its rotary engine, which kept the car below the equivalent 1500cc mark, the car escaped high levels of Japanese road tax, making it a popular road car from the outset.

As a race car, it had obvious benefits. At 1043kg, it was a lightweight base car even before it was stripped for racing and the Wankel engine fitted neatly behind the front axle, which helped to balance the front and rear weight distribution. It also had a low centre of gravity, which was again ideal for racing.

It was Tom Walkinshaw, always on the look out for that advantage that no-one else had spotted, who hit upon the idea of the RX-7 being a good touring car. Initially, Mazda aimed the car as a sportscar and the cars were entered for Le Mans in 1979, unsuccessfully, although they enjoyed

Pierre Dieudonne and team boss Tom Walkinshaw himself handled one of the rotary-engined cars to round-the-clock success at Spa

better fortunes in America in the IMSA sportscar series. Walkinshaw, though, could see that the car was better suited to touring car racing and entered the British Saloon Car Championship (as it was then known) in 1979 with a Pentax-backed car. Walkinshaw used the long wheelbase version of the car and was instantly under attack as Porsche, seeing what he was up to, wanted to homologate its 924. It had been told it wasn't a touring car, so Porsche protested that the Mazda wasn't one either. The Mazda's length just won the battle.

Through 1979 and 1980, the RX-7, driven by Walkinshaw and then Win Percy, was the car to beat in the BSCC's up to 2500cc class, the two 573cc units powering the car to class wins and overall victories on occasions. Indeed, the car's pace was such that the opposition soon fell away and in 1981 TWR and Mazda was forced to run extra cars, some barely more than converted road cars, to keep the number of entries in the class at a level at which Percy could score full points.

Walkinshaw also ran the RX-7 in Europe to the freer Group 2 regulations. He won the Spa 24 Hours, then the ultimate touring car race although oddly not part of the European Touring Car Championship that year, and again at Silverstone in the Tourist Trophy. More outlandish yet, with flared wheelarches and rear spoiler, came the Australian version, run by Canadian-born Allan Moffat. To Group C regulations, the so-called Big Banger class Down Under, Moffat persuaded rulemakers to let him use the larger 13B powerplant which gave the car even more grunt and its nimbleness allowed him to take on, and beat, the Ford and Holden V8 opposition. Weighing 950kg, kicking out 296 horsepower and running a six-speed gearbox, this was the ultimate Mazda RX-7 touring car. Indeed, so powerful was it that after Mazda pulled out of touring car racing in Australia at the end of 1984, one of Moffat's cars was sent to the Daytona 24-Hour sportscar classic.

"The RX-7 was soon the car to beat in Britain"

With success in rallying as well as club racing, the RX-7 was a star car of the early 1980s.

HAVING A RIOT OF A TIME

As 1981 dawned, myriad club racing categories were available, some national and some regional, some duplicating others. Drivers and fans had never had it so good, as **Paul Lawrence** remembers

Gerry Marshall was the man to beat in the two Production Saloon championships in his Autoplan-backed Ford Capri

WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY?

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The Silverstone Woodcote Chicane was a regular place for controversy but also incidents aplenty especially in Formula Ford 1600

New for 1981 was the Metro Challenge. Chris Lewis was a frontrunner, promoting fast food, perhaps...

The 1981 national motor racing season was a mark of changing times. The staple categories that had served motorsport well through the 1970s were under threat as Production Saloons and one-make racing moved toward centre stage.

At the head of the domestic scene, Jonathan Palmer turned his back on a career as a doctor to win the British Formula 3 title on his way to Formula 1. The circuits he would later take over and run were operated by John Webb, a true promoter and a man with a fertile imagination for creating categories and awareness.

In terms of race tracks, the Aintree club circuit was living on borrowed time for car racing and would close the following year. In another blow for northern fans and racers, Croft closed for car racing in 1981, three years after the end of racing at the temporary airfield track at Rufforth near York. The early 1980s was one of the bleakest periods for UK race tracks.

Meanwhile the future of Mallory Park was growing ever more uncertain as the '81 season unfolded. Thankfully, Edwina Overend and racer and property developer Chris Meek later came to the rescue of the Leicestershire track which reopened in May 1983 after a brief closure.

Our year in question, 1981, was also the one in which Charles married Diana but the pomp and pageantry of that event was in stark contrast to the riots that started in Brixton and Toxteth and spread across the country during a summer of discontent. 'Ghost Town' by the Specials was the soundtrack of a summer when a sense of urban decay and inner city violence spilled over.

Competitors and marshals arriving at a Mallory Park club meeting on a Sunday morning in early July, the day after some of the worst riots, spoke of their unease at being out and about and having to drive past burnt out cars and scenes of rioting as they travelled to Mallory. It was an unsettling time in many ways.

Despite the general economic malaise and sense of unrest, the 1981 racing season had plenty to be positive about. In British F3, Palmer's West Surrey Racing Ralt RT3 ran out a convincing championship winner from the Argo JM6 of Thierry Tassin and Raul Boesel in the Murray Taylor-run Ralt RT3. Elsewhere in a quality F3 field were drivers like David Leslie, James Weaver, Robert Moreno and David Sears.

While F3 was as strong as ever, Formula Atlantic was heading into its final death throes. Resurrected in 1979 following the debacle of Indylantic in 1976, the BRSCC gave it a another try and there was some initial hope. However, it never really gained traction and by 1981 average grids were barely into double figures as a 15-round championship included seven visits to Brands Hatch. Ray Mallock (Ralt RT4) was a worthy champion over Alo Lawler (RT4) and Phil Dowsett (March 81A) but its days were numbered.

In the next step down in single-seaters, mercurial Irishman Tommy Byrne was Pace Formula Ford 2000 champion after a fine campaign in his Rushen Green-run Van Diemen RF81.

Colin Blower shone in Production Sports Cars

"Aintree was on borrowed time"

Ian Briggs discovers the perils of late braking at the Shaw's Hairpin at Mallory Park as Rob Hall flees the scene

In a daunting 24-race schedule Byrne was the most regular winner but faced rivalry from people like Dave Coyne (Delta), Ian Briggs (Lola), Mike 'Fulmar' Taylor (Royale), evergreen eel seller Frank Bradley, rising star Calvin Fish and rapid Welshman Tim Davis in a Royale RP30 as other makes took on the standard-setting Van Diemens from Ralph Firman.

The RAC British Formula Ford 1600 Championship ran over just seven rounds and was dominated by gifted Brazilian Ayrton da Silva as he won four of the seven races. However, a double winner was Rick Morris in the works Royale RP29 and Rick, still racing an RP29 40 years later, is still able to dine out on the story of the day that he out-foxed the Brazilian at the Silverstone chicane to win a round of the championship over the rising superstar.

In the BARC Formula Ford Championship, South Americans Enrique Mansilla and Alfonso Toledano in the works Van Diemens were the two pacesetters and it was Mansilla who was far more consistent with a series of 11 wins from 20 rounds to emerge a resounding champion. Toledano was just as quick but tended to get involved in rather too many accidents, while Dave Coyne and David Wheeler also took wins. The BARC looked after the Junior Formula Ford championship and it was young Mark Peters in the Slush Puppie-backed Lola T540 who emerged a worthy champion.

Based primarily at Silverstone but with the occasional away day, the Esso-sponsored Formula Ford Championship featured some of the real legends of the category with fabulous racing being the norm as John Village emerged champion. The quality of the grid can be evidenced by the fact that other race winners that year were Andy Wallace, David Wheeler, Tom Wood, Rick Morris, Andy Ackerley, Steve Lincoln and Andrew Gilbert-Scott, every one of them a Formula Ford star.

Down at Castle Combe, the original one-circuit Formula Ford Championship remained strong and it was Bob Higgins who took the 1981 title in the rare Martlet DM4. It was the first of three titles in three years for Higgins who would still be racing in the championship four decades later.

The early 1980s was undoubtedly a time of change and the decade spawned the start of the rise of manufacturer-backed one-make racing. Although the twin Mini Challenges were already long established, new in 1979 had been the BMW County Challenge. A dozen 323s were race prepared by Tom Walkinshaw's team, backed by various BMW dealers and fielded in a series of races for notable national racers. Inevitably, the races were pretty rowdy and the concept was dropped at the end of the 1980 season.

Though not a rip-roaring success, the County Challenge was a sign of things to come as manufacturers, or their UK importers, saw a relatively easy way of getting some brand awareness and developing a sportier image for their tin tops. Indeed, the 1981 season marked the start of the arms race in one-make racing as manufacturers vied for competitor support, media coverage and public relations bang for their books.

British Leyland weighed in with the inaugural Metro Challenge, sponsored by Unipart, which was new for 1980 as BL started a one-make focus that would run for more than a decade and take in four varying models. Initially, the Metro Challenge centred on normally aspirated cars but would soon be ungraded to a turbo version, though the cars always retained an alarming propensity to hop if the back-end started to break away.

The Metro effectively took over from the Mini 1275GT series that had come before and quickly attracted a gaggle of quick drivers including Paul Taft, Mini ace Chris Tyrrell and Patrick Watts. The

"It was dominated by Ayrton da Silva"

Formula Talbot didn't meet its potential

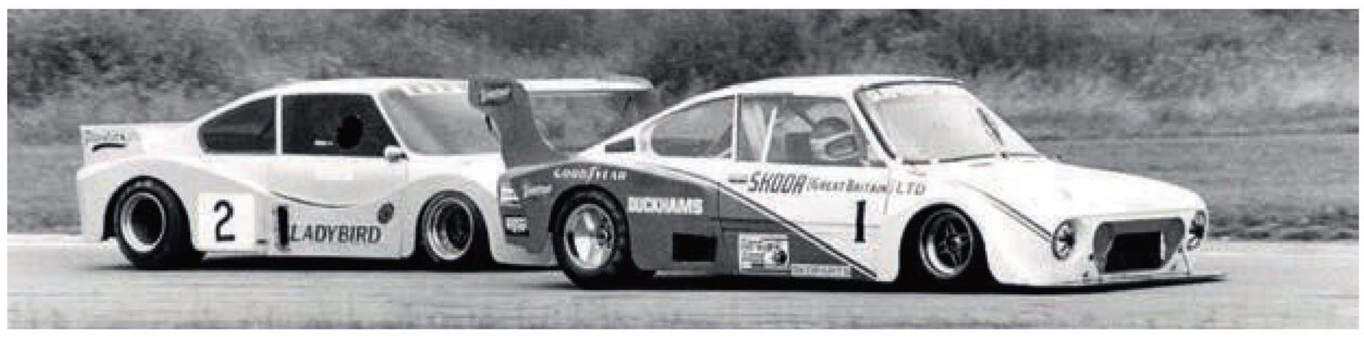
George "Welly" Potter's Chevrolet V8-powered Lotus Esprit clone was one of the outlandish cars in the Donington Special GT series

first Metro champion was Steve Soper, a driver who used one-make success as a springboard to much bigger and better things over the following decade or two. The Ford Fiesta Championship arrived in a blaze of glory and was won by the talented Rob Hall from one-make regulars Charles Tippett and Jim Edwards.

It was a big year for Production Saloons, which had started in the early 1970s and grown steadily in popularity with two major championships run in 1981. It was the outrageous talent of Gerry Marshall that won overall in both the Monroe and Wilcomatic series. Marshall's ever-sideways three-litre Capri generally emerged at the head of a gaggle of similar cars, as well as the Opel Commodores raced by Peter Hall, Syd Fox and Martin Carroll. In the classes, notable contenders included Roger Payne (Triumph Dolomite Sprint) Nick Baughan (Volkswagen Scirocco) and Marshall's drinking mate Tony Lanfranchi in another Scirocco with backing from Mayfair.

Special Saloon races were rather fewer and further between by 1981, but the Wendy Wools Championship run by the BRC still enjoyed decent grids. Although the top class was sometimes thinly supported, Peter Baldwin was the man to beat in the 1300cc division in his stunningly fast Maguire Mini while Skoda racer Tony Dickinson was often the best of the big cars.

In the north of England, the BRSCC ran a series for Special Saloons and modified sports cars and relied heavily on soon-to-close Croft as its home venue. Over at Donington Park, a well-funded Special GT Championship enjoyed good support from drivers



The Skodas of Tony Dickinson and Derek Walker enjoyed countless battles

Steve Hine was one of the stars of Renault 5TS Championship

Behind the pace car (as it was then), the Willhire 24-Hour race field prepares to do battle

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Sports 2000 proved popular with a series of 200-mile races joining the sprint race format

like Doug Niven, cousin of the late Jim Clark, and fellow Scot Walter Robertson. However, a significant accident early in the season interrupted Robertson's programme after a clash with Niven tipped the Robertson Skoda into a dramatic roll.

The slow demise of Special Saloons was also noticed at Castle Combe where a circuit-based championship had been run since 1975. The 1981 season would be the last before it evolved into a Special GT Championship in 1982. The champion was Cheltenham garage owner Basil Dagge in his immaculate Hillman Imp and it was the second such title for the ex-pat Irishman.

Sports 2000, created in 1977 by the fertile mind of Brands Hatch boss John Webb, was going strong with decent grids of Ford Pinto-powered sports-racing cars. On his way to racing internationally and at Le Mans, John Sheldon won the Derwent-backed UK title in his Tiga SC81 during a season that also took in Formula Atlantic. His racing career would still be going strong in 2021 after half a century of competition. Back in 1981, his Sports 2000 rivals included Mike 'Jersey' Taylor, Frank Sytner and Tim Lee-Davey.

The Clubmans category had four major championships running with the Tricentrol series based at Silverstone, the BARC's Protectol Championship, the Oceanair Championship for Formula Ford-engined B Sports cars only and another one at Donington Park. Scottish raider Andy Smith won both the Tricentrol and Donington titles in the latest Mallock Mk21 while David Orbell took his earlier Mk16 to the Protectol title. Malcolm Jackson was the Oceanair champion and in a good year for the Mallock marque Chris Kike added the Formula 1300 crown in his Mk20. Even the fledgling European Historic Formula Junior tile went to one of Major Arthur Mallock's front-engined cars as Mike Harrison was champion in an early U2 Mk2.

By 1981, historic racing was starting to gather momentum and the Historic Sports Car Club had run its first race meeting in 1979. Under the direction of Brian Cocks and with increasing backing from John Foulston, the club ran four championships in 1981, topped by the burgeoning Historic GT Championship.

Foulston used a McLaren M1B to win the title, while Roger Ealand (Marcos 1800) topped the Classic Sports Car Championship and Michael Bowler took his Lister Jaguar to the Historic Car Championship. Backing for the five-round series, which included a round as a support race to the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, came from the Lloyds and Scottish insurance business. Racing newcomer Michael Schryver won the Post-Historic Road Sports title in his Lotus Elan in the early stages of a 40-year career in historic racing.

In 1981, the sport was changing and not necessarily for the better. Special Saloons and Modsports were under attack and the rise of one-make racing had started. Before the decade was out, one-make single-seater racing would further change the face of national racing.

Jonathan Palmer took British F3 title

"Sports 2000 was going strong"

Formula Ford 2000 attracted big grids

The first steps on the ladder to greatness: Ayrton Senna hustles his Van Diemen RF81 through Paddock Hill Bend at Brands Hatch

AYRTON SENNA'S STAR BEGINS TO EMERGE

How the Brazilian took the UK by storm in Formula Ford 1600. By **Matt James**

Senna: two FF1600 titles in his first year

The Van Diemen leads Morris's Royale

"I couldn't pronounce his full name when I first heard it. Remember, back in those days he used to be called Ayrton Senna da Silva: so I just used to call him 'quick man'."

Those are the words of legendary car constructor Ralph Firman. Firman ran the benchmark Van Diemen Formula Ford 1600 team – the stepping off point for anyone who wanted a successful career in racing.

Chico Serra, the 1980 BARC champion Tommy Byrne and the 1980 BRSCC title winner Roberto Moreno could all vouch by Firman's products, and those three went on to big success further on in their motorsport careers. And it was Serra that was in Firman's ear about the New Kid in Town. Senna had dominated karting in his homeland. Formula Ford would be his next logical step, and Van Diemen would be his next logical destination.

Take into account that the British junior landscape was very different back then. All of the leading junior and senior motor racing teams were based in the UK and the path to England was a well-trodden one.

Norfolk-based Firman remembers the first time that the kid who'd made his name on the kart track in Sao Paolo came to meet him to discuss a deal for the 1981 British Formula Ford season.

"We used to use this restaurant in Attleborough called the Doric. Ayrton came over and we met him there," remembers Firman. "He was a tough guy to negotiate with, which I never held against him. We eventually did a deal and I got him in one of my cars. He seemed shy, and a little bit aloof, I suppose. He was only just approaching his 21st birthday. But you could tell he wanted to drive for us and given what I'd heard about him I wasn't going to say no – so long as the money was right."

That was part of the stumbling block: Senna already placed a healthy value on his ability, a foresight that was lacking in many karters. But he had yet to back it up in motorsport and needed to prove it. To do that, he needed Van Diemen and Firman.

Eventually a deal was thrashed out and Senna would slide into the cockpit

Best of enemies: A young Ayrton Senna (left) and his on-track rival RIck Morris celebrate after a race

of the Dave Baldwin-designed RF81 for a full campaign in the UK, including the BRSCC-run Townsend Thoresen Formula Ford 1600 championship and the RAC British Championship. He had a full roster of 20 races ahead of him in that maiden season.

Those initial outings in Firman's Van Diemen didn't quite point to the latent talent that the Brazilian would go on to demonstrate. Despite that, Ralph quickly realised that he had a skilful driver in his line-up and the championships would be firmly in his sights.

Firman explains: "I knew he was good, but it took him a couple of races to shake off all the habits he had learned from karting – but that is the same with a lot of drivers. A lot of the drivers expect a car to do what a kart would when they first drive it. It is a traditional problem. They seemed to think that you can barrel into a corner and turn the wheel but with only 100bhp that would kill the momentum of the car.

"Ayrton had to get that out of his system, but it didn't take him long. Once he got it, away he went. We knew that he was a fantastic driver, but I wouldn't say that we marked him out to go on and become the great champion he was. I wouldn't have been thinking ahead on that – even when we had the results we had."

Senna won the RAC British and Townsend Thoresen titles and his star was truly on the rise. It had been a competitive season though and Senna hadn't had things all his own way.

He went toe-to-toe with Briton Rick Morris in his factory Royale RP29 throughout the season. Indeed, Senna never won at Silverstone in the 1600cc category as he was beaten to the line in the British RAC round by Morris after a fierce battle. At the end of the season, Senna's trophy count was 12 from the 20 races he had entered.

While the Senna legacy went on to become a freight train of his own, there was a different view of the quiet Brazilian during that formative season, as Morris explains: " I knew a little bit about him from people like Chico Serra and Ralph and Angie Firman but until he arrived at the first race, I hadn't really said anything to him. I remember that he went through a phase, to begin with, where he was bowled over with how cold England was in March…

"Our rivalry evolved over the course of the season. To begin with, he wasn't dominant among the three factory Van Diemen drivers – he was with Enrique Mansilla and Alfonso Toledano.

"Senna had come with a massive history of karting success, but good karters come and go, don't they? But Senna got things together and he was an incredibly aggressive rival. He was also very insular and self-confident. He seemed to have picked up this attitude where he thought he was better than anyone else and that came very early on. Maybe that was down to his upbringing.

"As the season went on, Senna and I had a few run-ins and I remember he would force his way through on a number of occasions. He had been karting for years and there are a number of ways of overtaking in karting – and one of those is to just lob it up inside.

"I recall I was on pole at Oulton and he threw it up the inside and pushed

Pondering his future: Senna knew that he needed Van Diemen when he came to the UK, and the Norfolk team needed him too

The number one driver in number one car

Warmer climates: Senna liked the sun

"Senna was an aggressive driver"

me off. It was a typical karting move that I wasn't used to, because I was used to being among car racers who were much more polite.

"You soon get to know, though, who is good and who isn't, and there was a growing respect between us. He became the man, and I had often to get ahead of Mansilla and Toledano before I could get to Senna. He had a particularly good knack on the opening lap and I often had to then overtake his team-mates before we would be able to race together."

The relationship between the rivals developed over the course of that season, and Morris soon came to realise that Senna's attitude towards on-track foes changed when the pair's career went in different directions.

Morris explains: "Once he had gone to Formula Ford 2000 for the following season, it changed. We were mutual friends with Mauricio Gugelmin and Senna would come along to watch him race and we were very very friendly. I have a photo of my younger son Stevie in 1982 on Senna's shoulders watching a race at Paddock Hill Bend at Brands. It was all very smiley – he was a different person when you weren't a direct rival to him."

There was another rivalry that exploded towards the latter part of 1981, and it was nothing to do with a direct on-track opponent. Firman explains that Senna came close to taking part in the winner-takes-all, end-of-season Formula Ford Festival in October, but a breakdown in communication meant that he was thwarted at the last moment.

The team boss says: "He had a bit of a personal problem and he went back to Brazil, and that was why he missed the Festival. At the end of the regular race season, he said he would let me know on a specific date whether or not he would come back over to take part in the Formula Ford Festival. He said 'well, you didn't contract me for that event'. I just assumed it would be pretty obvious that he would come back and do it: it never crossed my mind that he wouldn't.

"As the Festival got closer, I started to get a bit panicky and I don't know why I never built another car up, just to be on the safe side. I will never know why I didn't do that. The days were ticking by and I hadn't heard from Senna, and so I asked [former Van Diemen works driver] Byrne if he would like to do the Festival in that car.

"On the very day that Ayrton has said he would be in touch, he phoned me to tell me he was at the airport ready to come over and do the Festival. I had a problem! I had to tell him that I had already offered the car to Byrne and I

didn't need him. I don't think he was angry, just disappointed.

"But then, a few weeks later in early January, he phoned again and said 'Ralph, I want to do Formula Ford 2000 in 1982'. So that time I told him to get on the plane, come over and we would talk about it. There was no bad feeling from either side."

Byrne went on to win the Formula Ford Festival in what was, essentially, Senna's regular race car. Firman needed a fast driver in his chassis for what was effectively the shop window of Formula Ford. It was an event that could have a very positive impact on the order book for the following season, so it was no wonder that Firman didn't want to be left in the lurch.

Senna was displeased that Byrne had taken his car and won the prestigious Formula Ford Festival crown – although there is some suggestion that Senna had deliberately swerved the Brands Hatch event, feeling it was too much of a lottery and could have done his burgeoning reputation some harm had he not dominated it.

Firman explains: "Well, if there was any animosity between Byrne and Senna after that Festival, it was my fault. If I had waited until the very day that Ayrton said he would be in touch, then he would have been in the car at Brands Hatch. I guess that has to be one of my regrets from that 1981 season."

Senna's absence from the Festival didn't harm his long-term prospects, as the record books will show. Arguably the sport's greatest driver had set the bandwagon rolling with the help of some true British ingenuity.

Senna: At one with the world

This is the view that became the normality for most of his rivals during the 1981 Formula Ford season. Here at Donnington Park, the Brazilian begins to demonstrate the inch-perfect racecraft which would go on to become his trademark. He extracted the most out of Van Diemen's RF81 machine and showed the world that he had the talent to back up the belief that he had in his own ability from the very first steps of his motor racing journey. He would go on to win two titles and 12 races in his maiden year on the tracks of the United Kingdom.

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HOW WSR TOOK ITS FIRST STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL TRACK RECORD

Matt James finds out how one of the UK's most famous race teams had a stuttering start in 1981

It is ironic that the West Surrey Racing team is now more well-known for its exploits in the tin-top based British Touring Car Championship.

Forty years ago, the seeds of the team's journey was sewn in Formula 3, a category which is was so closely identified with for a decade and a half. But team patron Dick Bennetts wasn't convinced that he wanted to strike out on his own to begin with. Having worked with Ron Dennis's Project 4 team on the F1-supporting Procar series and then running Stefan Johansson to the 1980 British F3 crown on behalf of Project 4, Bennetts was looking forward to a winter back in his New Zealand homeland.

"At the end of that 1980 season, Dennis told me to sell [Stefan's] car and the reigning Jonathan Palmer, and his mentor Mike Cox of West Surrey Engineering, got in touch," says Bennetts. "We took the to Goodwood and Stefan did a benchmark time, and then Jonathan, who had never driven an F3 car before, got in and was as fast as Stefan. He did a great job.

"Mike Cox bought the car, but they had only ever run a Formula Ford 1600. Palmer rang me a few weeks later and said that they had lost their way with it a bit during testing. I got them to bring it back to Project 4, and I gave them a list of things to do and not to do.

"I reset the car up with them and I went down to Goodwood. JP went quicker than we had ever been before, and I knew he was good. I took Mike Cox to one side and I told him, although it wasn't my problem, he had already spent quite a bit of money on the car and he needed to get someone who knew what they were doing to run it otherwise they had wasted their money. They had already engineered it backwards."

The Ralt RT3 now sits proudly at WSR's HQ

Palmer was the catalyst for big success

The new team takes to the F3 grid in '81

Little did Bennetts know, but that quick private chat would change the direction of his career. The seeds had been implanted within Cox's mind, and the cogs clicked into action. There was a phone call from Cox to Bennetts.

"He asked me what I was doing and asked me if I would be interested," says Bennetts. "I said I was committed to go back to New Zealand and run David Oxton over the winter, but yes. I was coming back mid-February, and then I went straight to West Surrey Engineering. I helped set it up from 12,000 miles away – the workshop close to Shepperton, the trucks, everything."

So those were the origins, but it was still run under the umbrella of Cox's original West Surry Engineering moniker for the first year, until there was a shift of emphasis 12 months later.

Bennetts remember: "We then changed it to West Surrey Racing the year after. I ran the show, but others looked after all of the finances for me. In 1981, Mike Cox promoted West Surrey Engineering on the car, but when we ran Enrique Mansilla in 1982, we had a full sponsor, so the West Surrey name came off the car and it was at that point we changed it. Cox stayed as a silent partner up until 1991. Then I took over the whole show. We moved to Lower Sunbury."

Doing things differently meant setting off on a successful journey in single-seaters first before switching to the BTCC. While Bennetts has his mind firmly on the here and now running the Team BMW 330i M Sports in the BTCC, there is a nod to the past when you walk into the team's workshops.

Sitting proudly in the lobby is that original Ralt RT3 which Palmer had raced four decades ago. Palmer, now boss of the Brands Hatch group of tracks, bought the car back in recent years and WSR has conducted a full restoration. It is a evocative signal of the team's foundations.

BIG PICTURE

When two worlds collide! Racing versus rallying

A popular end of season event in the 1980s was the Rallysprint, held initially at Donington Park. The idea was simple enough: take four rally drivers and four grand prix drivers and pit them against each other on a rally stage followed by a circuit race, for which everyone had the same equipment. In 1981, Hannu Mikkola was fastest on the rally stage and Tony Pond, seen here chasing Alan Jones, won the race to win the event on aggregate. Jones, in Mikkola's Audi Quattro, was the fastest of the F1 drivers on the gravel.

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ALL CROSSED UP

Rallycross, the mix of racing and rallying, was booming in Europe and in the UK, says **Mike Holder**.

Rallycross was a simpler affair back in 1981. In Europe, and Scandinavia, it was proving hugely popular with many a hero being behind the wheel, while in Britain it was reaching massive audiences with a couple of televised events each year taking the sport to tremendous audiences courtesy of the BBC's flagship Grandstand sports programme.

The European scene was split into two classes, a touring car division and a GT set, and although the cars ran together, there were separate points tables. In the GT division, Matti Alamaki was the man to beat as he stormed to the title in his Porsche 911, pursued by 1980 champion Olle Arnesson in a similar Porsche. The sport had yet to benefit from the advance of four-wheel-drive technology that was becoming common in the World Rally Championship, meaning that the drivers were balancing the power and grip on a knife-edge and the action was spellbinding. Alamaki had been a regular in the top three in his Porsche and as the power output level went up, so did his bravery in controlling the Porsche, while a constant thorn in the side of the 911s was Andy Bentza in his charismatic Lancia Stratos, transferring its rally credentials to the track. With rallycross a mix of tarmac and loose surfaces, speed was as crucial as a reliable car, able to cope with the demands of the sudden change in terrain.

Will Gollop broke the Escort domination in the UK with his Saab 99

If the GT cars were stars in their own right, there was a star behind the wheel in the touring car division, Norwegian Martin Schanche. The moustachioed Schanche was not only a fiery driver, he had astonishing car control and a decent CV already for a man who only started racing aged 27. He had won the championship in 1978 and '79 and spent the season fighting against a big effort from Per-Inge Walfridsson in his Volvo 343. Walfridsson came into the season as reigning champion, after Volvo had made a massive effort to boost sales in motorsport. Rallycross was becoming more and more popular in Sweden and as Walfridsson took the European title and Per Engseth the Swedish, Volvo decided to leave the sport officially as it had achieved its goals. Tacit support was offered and indeed the cars sported turbo engines as 1981 progressed in an effort to combat Schanche's pace but ultimately it was Dutchman Piet Dam whose consistency became Schanche's main threat. Schanche won the title from Dam, Walfridsson third.

Graham Hathaway was rapid

"Schanche was a fiery driver"

In the UK, fans loved the variety of car and the giant-killing antics of the smaller cars. With a two-class system, split at 1600cc, the Minis and Ford Fiestas battled for smaller class honours while the Ford Escorts were

Typical 1980s Rallycross. Rough circuits, varied grids and enthusiastic crowds

Trevor Reeves pensioned off his Mini for a new Metro

Keith Ripp won the British title

the cars to have in the larger class, although there was variety from the likes of mushroom farmer Richard Painton's Triumph TR7 V8 and the Porsche 911 of John Greasley. Graham Hathaway, Tony Drummond and John Welch were the star Escort drivers, although Barry Squibb and Dennis Atkinson notched up round wins as well. The season started at Snetterton before a round at the stock car venue of Northampton won by Ian Rawle's Mini. John Greasley then used his Porsche power for the first of two Lydden wins. Aintree, Knockhill, Talbenny and Long Marston, most now long gone, were other venues in a season wherein the title was won by Keith Ripp's Ford Fiesta which won outright at Talbenny, but the Mini opposition had to take notice of the new BL Metro of Trevor Reeves which was becoming more of a threat.

It was fast, noisy and spectacular and continued in that vein for the decade. MJ

Martin Schanche's turbocharged Escort fends off the Volvo attack

ALL-ACTION STATIONS

Oval racing was booming in the 1980s with star names and more classes. **David Addison** takes a look

In 1981, the sport of stockcar racing was changing fast. It had gone from a fairground attraction almost to a serious branch of motorsport. More classes had been added and an increasing number of non-contact formulae that were a far cry from the original push 'n' shove class.

Hot Rod racing was changing in 1981. It had been the domain of the Ford Escort for a decade, right from Bob Howe winning the first World championship in 1972, to the endless battles between Barry Lee, George Polley and Mick Collard. Over the water, though, the fertile mind of Northern Irishman Ormond Christie was working overtime. He'd already raced a Triumph Spitfire and upset the rulemakers who declared it a sportscar and not a saloon, so he switched to a Triumph Vitesse: same again. So, he looked for the next car with which he could gain an edge over the Ford Escorts, and, after trying a Colt Lancer, worked out that the unprepossessing Toyota Starlet was the answer.

The 1981 Hot Rod Championship of the World was at its usual home of Foxhall Heath in Ipswich and, having won the Irish Grand Prix, Christie headed over the water in optimistic mood. Starting second alongside poleman Collard (Ford Escort),

Christie had the boxy hatchback on his tail and was soon pushing, chased in turn by Davy Evans (Vauxhall Chevette). Evans won on the road, passing late-race, but was docked for contact on the Starlet giving Christie the first of five World Championship wins. Christie also won the European title and Midlander Pete Stevens took the National title at his home circuit of Hednesford outside Cannock. However, Hot Rod racing

Deane Wood gets turned around at the 1981 Spedeweekend in a typical Saloon Stock Car thrash

Christie's Starlet: World Final win

Barry Lee took the British title

Mick Collard started from pole for the '81 World but faded

legend Lee wasn't to be denied some glory and he guided his familiar 351-numbered Ford Escort to the British Championship.

The Hot Rod World Championship was one of the season's races that benefited from live ITV prime-time coverage. Clashing with Wimbledon tennis was never going to be a ratings winner, so ITV wanted something that was cheap and easy to cover. Oval racing was just that and it backed up the televised Winternationals run in the New Year at Wimbledon Stadium. Both remained on ITV's World of Sport show until it was axed in 1985.

A former Hot Rod star, Gordon Bland who had won the World championship in '79, was one of a gang of pioneers looking for something a bit different. Super Rods followed a similar concept to Hot Rods as a non-contact formula, but was for bigger-engined cars so Ford Capris and Rover 3500s were the weapons to have and Bland won the European crown with the British falling to Dick Hillard and Tim Foxlow netting the National title.

The next generation of racer was also being encouraged in 1981. With circuit racing having karting as the nursery slope, so oval racing needed an equivalent and Spedeworth introduced Ministox for 10-16-year-olds. It was a contact category and soon proved to be an excellent training ground as the Minis, with huge bumpers for and aft, rattled their way around Spedeworth raceways. Among the first event was winners was Paul Warwick, following in the wheeltracks of older brother Derek who was racing for Toleman in Formula 1 but had cut his own teeth on the ovals, winning the Superstox World Championship in 1973.

North of the border, the Cowdenbeath circuit, that ran around the outside of the town's football pitch, decided to split away from Spedeworth and went its own way under the guidance of Formula 2 ace Gordon McDougall. Out went Superstox and in came BriSCA Formula 2, as Cowdenbeath became a very popular place to race North of the border.

Neil Bee added the Superstox World crown to his CV in Kaldekirchen in Germany, battling up from a mid-grid draw, while Len Wolfenden scored the coveted BriSCA F1 World Championship at Odsal Stadium in Bradford ahead of a hard-charging Brian Powles and Bill Batten added the F2 crown to his impressive CV after a maiden win in 1977.

Spedeworth's Banger World Championship fell to farrier Nick Linfield while Deane Wood, who would go on to own Spedeworth two decades later, was a rising star in the rowdy world of Saloon Stock Car racing.

Wolfenden won BriSCA F1 World

Gordon Bland in Super Rod action

"Out went Superstox, in came BriSCA F2"

PARTING SHOT

One for the near future

The Fittipaldi F1 team was struggling to stay afloat and a merger with Wolf Racing, which was reversing out of grand prix racing, didn't really help matters in the first year of the 1980s. The team did, however, have an ace up its sleeve: Keijo Rosberg, known as Keke. His pace was part of the reason co-founder and team-mate Emerson Fittipaldi left grand prix racing at the end of 1980. The following year was the story of a team imploding, but its Finnish ace battled on manfully. Here, at Monaco, he failed to make the cut and get into the race. The question was: was anyone watching Rosberg's progress?

TOYOTA
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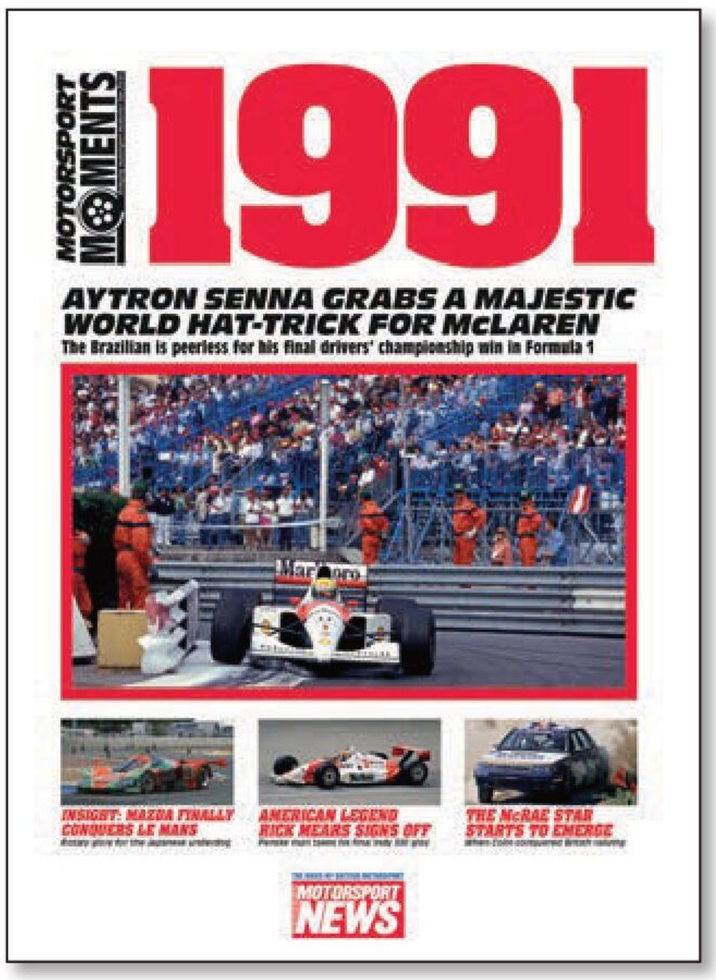
Candy

COMING SOON!

1991

In the third of our series of **Motorsport Moments** bookazines, we look back 30 years to the 1991 season. Ayrton Senna was the king of Formula 1, Mazda pulled off an unlikely triumph at Le Mans and the story of Colin McRae was writing its first chapters...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